

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:  
The Rajah's Second Wife. A Story of Mis-  
sionary Life in India.  
The Divinations of Kalá Persad, and Other  
Stories.  
Beacon Fires; or, War Stories of the Coast.

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WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED.

THE  
QUEEN OF NIGHT.

OF "THE RAJAH'S SECOND WIFE," "THE DIVINATIONS OF  
KALA PERSAD," "BEACON FIRES," ETC., ETC.

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# THE QUEEN OF NIGHT.



## PROLOGUE.

AN octagon room, softly lighted by hanging silver lamps, and carpeted with Eastern pile of such generous woof that footsteps fell noiseless ; the incense-like odour of fragrant woods burning in an antique grate ; one priceless picture—no more—on each of the eight walls ; and a white-draped dining-table bright with the glitter of cut crystal and the dull sparkle of ruby wine. At the table, facing each other, two men in evening dress are seated. Empty coffee cups and the curling wreaths of cigarette smoke mark the close of the repast, and even as we ring up the curtain on this eventful drama one of them—the guest—makes a move preparatory to departure. He is a slim, elderly man, with stooping shoulders and a faded face of the aquiline type—usually called, in cant phrase, aristocratic. He has already half risen from the table, when he

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appears to remember something. Drawing forth a pocket-book, he reseats himself, and, poising a pencil, sends a curious, furtive glance in the direction of his host.

"By the way, Vizard," he says, nervously, "I was so interested in what you were saying that I neglected details. Would you give me that address before I go?"

As he waits for the answer his eyes wander to the pictures, to the flower-crowned epergne, to the dishes of hothouse fruit—anywhere but to meet the calm gaze that is watching him from across the table. The fingers that hold the pencil tremble like aspen leaves.

The voice that gives the information is clear-cut and musical. "My dear Sir Simon, of course I will," it says. "The name of the vessel is the *Queen of Night*, and the agents are Nathan and Co., 315, Harp Alley, Fenchurch Street. They have a West-end branch in Pall Mall, but, if you require a *special* arrangement, you would have to do business with Mr. Nathan himself—at the City address."

The host—he who answers the question—is by far the most striking personality in the room. Six feet high and splendidly proportioned, he attracts attention rather by the magnetic power of his well-chiselled face than by his inches and the muscular force revealed in the broad chest and shoulders. Clean shaven, with square massive jowl and deep-set unfathomable eyes of steely gray, Gaston Vizard—

## PROLOGUE.

the mystery of four London seasons—is known in the *beau monde* he frequents as the handsomest man about town. Yet there are one or two keen observers—women mostly—who avow that they have surprised an expression on those readily-smiling lips that has turned them faint with fear. No one knows his origin, though that matters not nowadays when “dollars maketh man.” He is immensely rich, and, in the jargon of society, is “received everywhere,” justifying that reception, too, by the perfect breeding of his manners and by the princely hospitality dispensed by him both here in his Park Lane mansion and at his country house in Hertfordshire. Even his nationality has never been rightly settled. Some say that he is of the old French *noblesse*, but born in America; others that he led a revolution in Chile and escaped, more fortunate than most of the kind, with his money and his life. For the rest, he might be any age from thirty to forty-five, and any one meeting him in the street might take him for an officer of cavalry.

The guest writes down the address and again rises with the evident intention of taking his leave. Vizard comes round from his seat at table to accompany him to the hall, but once more he who has been called Sir Simon hesitates, and with a quick nervous gesture detains his host from leaving the room. The latter stops short with his hand on the door, and, towering over the shrinking figure, invites further questioning with a mere elevation of the eyebrows.



"It all seems so risky," faltered the elder man. "How should I open up negotiations with Nathan—for what you call a special arrangement, I mean—without fear of compromise?"

Vizard takes from his vest pocket a little sheaf of cards, neatly blended together, and, selecting one, hands it to his guest. "Give him that," he says. "Nathan will understand that you mean business and are properly introduced. You need *tell* him nothing beyond the name, and *do* nothing but pay what he asks. The terms are high, but may be regarded in the light of an investment. There will be absolutely nothing in writing. It is the essence of the system to take all risks without possible compromise to clients."

Sir Simon glances at the card. It is blank, save for a red heart pierced by a black arrow. "Good God, how horrible!—a sort of modern *lettre de cachet*," he says, shuddering. "And you are sure, Vizard, that this will be effective—that there will be no hitch? It would be terrible to tempt fortune in such a way—and fail."

There is a touch of amused contempt in Vizard's tone as he replies, "There are no failures. If Miss Challenor takes the trip under the special arrangement, her health will receive the attention you require for her."

With these words he opens the door as though there is nothing more to be said, and leads his guest downstairs to a splendid entrance-hall, where two

footmen spring quickly to attention. One comes forward with Sir Simon's hat and inverness cape, and the other flings open the front door to summon the waiting brougham. A few words of commonplace farewell are exchanged, and the carriage rolls away, leaving Vizard gazing after it from the top step with an inscrutable smile. There is nothing to distinguish the neatly-appointed equipage from the hundreds of similar ones it meets as it turns into Piccadilly : yet it bears the beginning of a train as deadly as any ever laid to mine of gunpowder.

After a minute Vizard goes slowly upstairs again to the octagon room where he has entertained his guest. Touching a hidden spring in the wall, he reveals a cunningly concealed iron safe, whence he takes a small morocco-bound ledger in which he makes a few rapid entries. What he writes is in cypher, and quite unintelligible to any one not possessing the key. This done, he replaces the book, relocks it in the safe, adjusts the secret panel, and is glancing at the clock, when, after knocking, a manservant enters to announce—

“ Doctor Zavertal.”

The subject of the announcement follows quickly into the room, and Vizard advances to greet him with the effusive cordiality of one who is pleased to see a congenial acquaintance. This only lasts, however, till the servant has closed the door and retired. The moment they are alone the show of demonstrative friendship is dropped on both sides

for something closer still—for a brevity betokening that their relations are confidential and intimate.

"Everything is in order?" inquires Vizard, not with any anxiety of manner, but as though some importance attached to the answer.

"A most satisfactory cruise," replies the doctor, rubbing his hands softly together in true professional style as he seats himself in an armchair with the air of being thoroughly at home. He is, in his way, almost as remarkable as his friend—this English-speaking medico with the curious foreign name. Short in stature, he is rotund and stout withal, and wears on his broad weather-browned face a cheerful expression of good-fellowship that may well make him a favourite with his patients. But looking closer, especially now that he has thrown restraint aside, one might see in his blue eyes, smiling though they are, the same steely coldness that has been noticed in Vizard's gray ones. Seen here for the first time in private, and narrowly studied, he would perhaps give the impression of a man who is always playing the part of "a genial soul," and that the character, though not natural to him, has become so ingrained that he lays it aside with difficulty. Gradually, as he talks to his companion of strange doings on the sea, his face hardens, and the purring smoothness of his voice takes a more metallic ring.

Vizard, evidently knowing the doctor's habits, mixes a glass of claret and water and hands it to him without remark—as a matter of course. Then he

leans his back against the mantelpiece and pursues his questioning :

"News of three of the 'specials' reached me in ordinary course of post. There was still one unaccounted for when you left Gibraltar?"

"That was Trefusis, the Tyneside coal-owning millionaire," says Zaverthal, sipping his claret. "He died as we were crossing the Bay of Biscay. Hemorrhage of the liver with complications, I was able to certify."

The two men look at each other strangely. There is a cynical dash of droll humour in the doctor's eye, a twist on Vizard's mouth. Then the latter says—

"That was rather leaving things to the last, was it not? The off-chance of having to bring him home for burial, I mean."

"There were circumstances to cause delay ; being in charge on the spot, I have often to be guided by such. You can have no idea what trivial things occur to hamper me sometimes. I would rather bring a special home again than take risks," replies the doctor, with a tinge of remonstrance in his tone. "There was no difficulty whatever," he adds ; "I was able to say that the nature of the case demanded immediate disposal of the remains. He was buried the same day, at sea."

"Good," says Vizard. "The 'special' department is on a sound footing, then, and will show a handsome balance on the voyage. Is there anything fresh in ordinary administration?"

"Yes; we shall have to find a new skipper for next cruise," replies Zavertal, not, however, as though the information were of unusual importance. "Captain Luck expresses his intention of giving up the command, and I expect his resignation is on its way to Nathan by this time. On parting from me at the Docks this evening he said he had fully decided not to make another trip in the *Queen*."

"He does not suspect?" says Vizard, impassively.

"Oh, dear no—nothing of that kind," returns the doctor. "I flatter myself he would never have left the ship carrying so much as the germ of suspicion with him. He has been promised the command of a steamer, in the Australian trade—a regular liner—and he thinks the prospect more certain than on a pleasure cruiser only running part of the year. He has been talking of chucking the berth these several voyages past."

"H'm," reflects Vizard aloud: "Luck combined the three essentials of good seamanship, social charm, and crass stupidity. It will be difficult to find such another all in a hurry, but it must be done. My 'special' arrangements for next cruise are nearly completed, and in a day or two we shall be able to give Nathan the date of sailing."

"Excellent Gaston," says the doctor, approvingly. "And how many 'special' patients do you hand over to me this time?"

"Two are finally settled—the young Earl of Darranmore, a boy of fourteen fresh from Eton;

and Desmond Orlebar, a country gentleman of Hampshire," replies Vizard, with the coolness of an auctioneer cataloguing his "lots." "The first goes at the instance of his uncle, Ralph Darran, who is next heir to the title; and the second under the auspices of his wife, who I suppose has some feminine reason for desiring a change. Then to-night I have had Sir Simon Crawshay here. I have been playing him—the half-hearted coward—quite a long while for his ward, the rich Miss Challenor, and he is as good as captured at last. He went away after dinner with the usual introduction to Nathan in his pocket, and you know how that pans out."

"Yes; they never draw back when they have confided in you so far as to extract that gentle missive," assents the doctor. "We may count on three, then—all told—and quite as many as I care to have on one trip now that the boat is so popular and crowded with ordinary pleasure-seekers. By the way, that new rule that 'specials' shall not be accompanied by the principals to, or by any one cognisant of, the private arrangement is eminently satisfactory. When we first began we narrowly missed more than one miscarriage through clients, by being on board, having the chance to relent at the last moment."

"I thought that would strengthen the system and lighten the strain upon you," remarks Vizard, with the lazy self-contentment of a man who has fathered a good idea. "And speaking of vigilance reminds

me," he adds, stiffening up and taking a step forward to look down impressively into Zavertal's upturned eyes, "I had advices from Cincinnati a week ago that Kennard is in Europe."

The doctor laughs, quite harshly for a man of such genial temperament, and for the space of two seconds the crow's-feet on his broad face deepen into visible channels. Then he says jauntily, "And what of that? I beat him before and could do it again. They make a little god of him in the States—as the greatest detective of the age—but he doesn't often meet *men*."

"Quite so," replies Vizard, "and his present journeyings can have no concern with us. But as he alone knows your record, I thought you should be aware that he is on this side the Atlantic. Of myself he has no knowledge—for which, perhaps, he rather than I should be congratulated."

Doctor Zavertal's only answer is a smile of intense amusement. Then, after a pause, he rises, and, draining his glass, says, with apparent irrelevance—

"The *Queen of Night* sinks all obstructions, eh Gaston?"

## CHAPTER I.

### *HARD LINES.*

"DEUCE take the luck." That was the phrase which embodied my sentiments as I kicked heels in the outer office of the Flower Steamship Company while the Directors deliberated on my case in the seclusion of the Board-room. I was as certain of "the sack" as man could be. I knew it from the proverbial devotion of our Board to red-tape; I knew it from the sympathetic glances flung at me by the clerks from behind the great brass-rimmed counters; I knew it from what good old Beatson—kindest of skippers—prophesied when he promised to "speak a word"; and, above all, I knew it because I am a sailor, and, believing in presentiments, believed in that which told me that my hours as first officer of the *Dahlia* were numbered.

Directors are fond of letting their jaw-tackle run, so as they are safe for another ten minutes before they have me in for sentence; I may as well spend



the interval in overhauling my log of what has thrown me on my beam-ends. My name is Cyril Forrester, at that time thirty years old, five feet ten in my stockings, sound in wind and limb, and holding a master's certificate in the mercantile marine, though never yet in command of a vessel, and under present circumstances never likely to be. The Flower Line of steamships, as every one knows, plies between London and Calcutta, touching at the chief Mediterranean ports; and the little incident that gave those grim old hunkses in the Board-room the chance to get their knives into me occurred on the last voyage out.

We had left London on a Tuesday afternoon, and all went well till the following Thursday morning, when we were steering a steady fifteen knots across the mouth of the Channel. It was my watch, and except for the quartermaster, who was steering, I was alone upon the bridge, the captain being at breakfast in the saloon. The weather was thick, with a nasty choppy sea, and the third officer, who shared my charge of the deck, was forward on the fo'castle seeing that the look-out man didn't go to sleep. Suddenly my ears were startled by a scrunching crash from, as far as I could judge, about two hundred yards off on the port beam, followed by screams and shouts which told me as plain as words could speak that two vessels were in collision close at hand. Almost at the same moment, the haze broke a little, and showed me the black hull of a

steam-collier slinking away to the westward, and a smart, yawl-rigged yacht cut down to the water's edge, and with scarcely a minute to float.

I altered the *Dahlia's* course so as to bring her round to the sinking craft, singing out at the same time to the third officer to clear away a boat. As we neared the yacht I could see that all was confusion on her, and no wonder: her one boat was stove in, and the rascally collier, instead of standing by to help, was already out of sight in the mist. To make matters worse, I caught sight of ladies on the sloping deck, and I knew that unless the yawl floated a few minutes longer they would be in danger, since our ship came round but slowly on a jammed helm.

I was keeping one eye on the men engaged in lowering the boat and the other on the yacht, when she plunged forward, then staggered back and went down stern foremost, leaving her people struggling in the sea. Our boat was still at the davit, the freshly-painted gear working stiffly, and I could see that any one who was not a strong swimmer would be swept away and drowned before they could be picked up. It was no time to reckon rules and consequences, and almost before I knew what I was going to do my shoes were kicked off and I had taken a header from the bridge.

Our ship had greatly reduced the distance, and a few strokes brought me to the scene of the disaster, where about a score of people were keeping them-

selves afloat in the best way known to them. Luckily the yacht was too small to have sucked them down. An elderly gentleman in flannels, with a life-belt on, was hanging on to a spar, and a man who looked like the sailing-master was supporting a lady who was screaming at the top of her voice some word which I could not make out. The rest—all men and evidently the crew—were swimming strongly towards the *Dahlia*.

I was beginning to think that I had been rather too officious, when a draggled whisp of blue serge, rising in the water between me and the gentleman on the spar, caused me to change my mind and feel glad that I had come. It was the insensible form of a woman, floating limply to the surface for the first time after immersion, and on the point of sinking again when I managed to grab her by the arm. I noticed no more than that she was young and lay quite a featherweight in my embrace, for my chief concern was now with the arrival of the boat. Looking round, I was glad to see it coming towards us fast, while the *Dahlia* herself was standing on at quarter speed lest she should run down the yacht's crew, who were already reaching her side. Seeing how I was hampered, the third officer steered his boat straight for us, and after picking us up went on for the sailing-master and his burden, last of all taking in the man on the spar.

Five minutes later we were all safe on board the *Dahlia*, and the two ladies, who were alone the

worse for the accident, were handed over to our surgeon and stewardess. The passengers, who had come up from the saloon to witness the rescue, crowded round me with the usual fuss of congratulation and curiosity, so that another ten minutes passed before I could slip into dry clothes and join the captain on the bridge. He shook hands with me warmly, but he was looking as solemn as a church.

"This is going to end badly, Forrester, I am afraid," he said. "You only did what any decent chap would have done, but you know as well as I do that it was dead against the rules. To leave the bridge with no one in charge is a heinous crime with the wiseacres of Leadenhall Street, and I am bound to log the incident."

"I never gave the rule a thought," I said, "and I don't believe it would have made any difference if I had."

There having been no loss of life, the excitement soon calmed down, and we stood on our course southward. It was ascertained that the sunken yacht *Norah* had been chartered for a channel cruise by Sir Simon Crawshay, the elderly man who had saved himself by clinging to a spar, and that the ladies were respectively his sister, Mrs. Beauchamp, and his ward, Miss Aline Challenor, the latter being the girl whom I had managed to pick up. In the course of the morning I heard that Miss Challenor had quickly revived under the surgeon's treatment, and that Sir Simon had decided to go on in the *Dahlia*.

to Naples, whence he would be able to take his party home overland more expeditiously than from Gibraltar.

I saw no more of the ladies that day, but during the afternoon, being off duty, I was talking to some of our own passengers on deck, when Captain Beatson passed in conversation with Sir Simon. The latter had been fitted with dry clothes by some passenger, and he appeared to be none the worse for his dip. I cannot say that I took much of a liking for the man. I saw by the furtive way he kept his eyes askance that he had recognised me, and one would have thought that under the circumstances he would have wished to say something civil. But they passed and repassed several times on their promenade, Sir Simon always at that moment finding an object of interest at the other side of the deck, and Captain Beatson too busy with his discussion to notice surroundings. At about the fifth turn, however, the skipper's eyes chanced my way, and he at once brought his companion to a halt, introducing me as the officer who had got Miss Challenor into the boat.

Now though I come of a fairly decent family myself, my father having been a clergyman and the grandson of a peer, I went to sea so early that my dealings with the aristocracy have been limited. I was therefore not sure whether Sir Simon Crawshay's manner towards myself arose from blue blood or from a black heart: but even if it was *infra dig*

for a baronet to extend his gratitude to a mere officer in the Merchant Service, I thought it singular that he should show such callousness about his ward's escape. "Oh, indeed! very interesting, and all that sort of thing, I'm sure," was the extraordinary reception he accorded me, adding, with an artificial smile designed apparently to show an expensive set of false teeth, "And did you find the water cold?" Then, without waiting for a reply, he put his hand on the captain's arm and wheeled him round to continue his promenade.

"He's a beast, Forrester—a perfect beast," the skipper said to me when we were alone upon the bridge together that evening. "His treatment of you was only on a par with his conversation with me. He is thinking a good deal more of the loss of his effects on the yacht than of the safety of his sister and his ward."

It was not till the next morning that Aline Challenor appeared on deck and I formed the acquaintance that was destined to lead to such wonderful things. I can see her now, as she came forward with both hands outstretched, a dainty fairy of a girl, with a clear, fresh complexion and real violet eyes that could be frank without being forward. Her own simple blue serge yachting dress had been dried and put to rights for her, and I should never have recognised in the smart little figure the poor pale, half-drowned creature whom I had held in my arms the day before. As she thanked me

in a few words for my help, I thought I had never seen such a pretty girl before, and—there! as the whole of the story hinges on it there is no need for secrecy—I fell head over heels in love with her there and then.

“I am very glad to have been of use,” I said, trying not to show my admiration in my face. “But there is really no reason why you especially should thank me. You see I just ‘went it blind,’ and it was as likely to have been one of the others I chanced upon as you. I am glad it wasn’t, though.”

“You shall not rob me of my gratitude,” she replied. “At any rate it *didn’t* happen to be one of the others, and it *did* happen to be me, and—and I shall never forget it.”

From that beginning our friendship grew rapidly, as it only can on ship-board, and by the time the *Dahlia’s* bows were turned eastward through the Straits it had ripened into that later phase of friendship in which, without awkwardness, there can be long silences. Sir Simon’s demeanour towards me continued curt and distant—that of his sister, Mrs. Beauchamp, equally so—but he could not very well forbid his ward to speak to the man who had saved her life, and though it was plain that he viewed our increasing intimacy with cynical dislike, he probably counted on the coming separation at Naples to put an end to it.

If so, he was out of his reckoning by about thirty

hours. We were that time distant from our port of call, and I remember as if it were yesterday what a beautiful Mediterranean evening it was, when Aline and I shook off the chrysalis shell of friendship for the golden butterfly of love. I found her behind the aft wheelhouse—that time-honoured tryst of sea-going lovers. For several minutes we watched the white streak eddying from the screw without speaking. Then I said—

“Aline, are you sorry that your voyage on the *Dahlia* is so nearly at an end?”

It was the first time I had called her by her Christian name—a fact of which the significance will be appreciated by those who have “been there” themselves. Her answer came, faltering a little, but prompt enough for me—

“You know I shall,” and then after a pause was shyly added the one word—“Cyril.”

This is no love story—there is sterner work ahead—and I have not space, even if I had the will, to write down here the words in which my sweet girl and I plighted our troth. All I can say is, that though I had seen thirty years without any sweet-hearting, it came natural enough at last, and that when we left the shelter of the wheelhouse we were bound by every promise to be faithful to each other against all odds, all opposition. As the time we should have together was to be so short, we decided to keep our secret till my return from the Eastern voyage, when I could try to secure Sir Simon’s



consent to a formal engagement. Aline would not come of age for a year, and in the meanwhile, under her father's will, she was not permitted to take any step without her guardian's sanction, though in our new-found happiness we paid but little heed to possible opposition from that quarter. At the worst there would be but nine months, from the date of my return, to wait before she would be her own mistress.

So we parted, full of hope and mutual trust, in the bright sunshine of Naples Bay, and here I was, on the day after the *Dahlia's* return, waiting to be carpeted for the "grave dereliction of duty" which had given Aline back her life. Even as I came to the end of my reverie a bell rang, and a clerk invited me to step into the Board-room, where one glance at the faces of my censors told me my fate at once. The chairman, an old fellow whiskered all round his face like a cat, and having a fierce eye, rose at once—rose, too, as if he liked the job.

"We have fully considered your case, Mr. Forrester," he said. "While quite recognising the gallantry of your act, we cannot pass over the breach of the company's rule which forbids an officer to leave the bridge till another officer has come up to take his place. As a practical sailor you must see that the ship, and—ahem—the lives of the passengers might be endangered by such an irregularity. We regret it exceedingly on many grounds, but your employment by the company must terminate with the voyage just concluded."

On the whole I managed to keep my temper, but I said a few polite things about their rules which made the old gentleman look very thoughtful before I bowed myself out and stepped down into the street, a cast-off servant. My first impulse was to charter a hansom and drive to the address in Grosvenor Square at which Aline said I should find her, but then there rushed over me the sudden remembrance that the situation had altered. For the present I was a broken man; and, though I did not despair of getting another berth, a feeling of pride urged me to take some steps to that end before presenting myself to Sir Simon. I knew not then that my girl was a great heiress, and that a first mate's proposal for her hand would be nearly as presumptuous as that of a penniless pavement-trotter.

I knew a restaurant frequented by merchant service men near Fenchurch Street Station where the shipping newspapers were taken, and thither I made my way to see if the advertisement columns had anything in store for me. Seating myself at one of the round tables, I gave an order "for the good of the house," and started to go through the list of vacancies systematically, but without finding the ghost of an opening in my line. Finally flinging the papers aside in disgust, I rose to leave the place, when my eye was caught by a written notice stuck on the wall. It ran as follows:—

"The owners of the screw-steamship *Queen of Night*, 7,000 tons, used as a pleasure cruiser or ocean yacht,

require a commander having the necessary certificates. In addition to the usual qualifications as to seamanship, &c., he must be of good social address and able to act as host to the passengers on terms of equality. Apply to Nathan & Co., 315, Harp Alley, Fenchurch Street."

As I finished reading, and before I had digested the words, a lean hand was laid upon my shoulder, while a garlic-flavoured voice croaked in my ear: "The notish is to your liking, my young captain, I hope?"

Turning quickly on my heel, I saw that he who had accosted me was a little shrivelled old Jew—or, rather, the quintessence of about fifty Jews boiled into one, so pronounced were the national characteristics of fleshy lip, hooked nose, and shining protuberant eyes that looked up at me with a cunning leer.

## CHAPTER II.

### *A NEW BERTH.*

RESENTING the Jew's intrusive familiarity, I shook his hand off smartly. "The notice is all right," I began, "but I don't quite see——"

"What bithneth it is of mine," he interrupted, with a chuckle that was meant to be conciliatory. "Quite right, my dear sir ; how should you see it ? But perhaps you will understand better when you hear that I am, Lemuel Nathan, of 315, Harp Alley, and the author of that little invitation. May I ask if it has any special interest for you ?"

The fact of his being "Nathan & Co" certainly furnished a sufficient excuse for his having addressed me, for my clothes would have shown him that I was a ship's officer, and he might therefore have supposed me to be a possible applicant. Moreover I had now had time to perceive in the written notice what I had missed in the newspaper advertisements—a chance of getting good employment—and I hastened to make amends for my curtness.

"Of course that gives you every right to inquire," I said. "Yes, I hadn't had time to make up my

mind when you spoke, but I think I was about forming the intention to come and see you about it."

"And so you shall, my dear young friend: you shall come over to my little offish at once," he replied. "It is close by, and we can talk in my private room more quietly than in a restaurant. Come! shall we strike while the iron is hot?"

He had taken instant advantage of my change of tone to slip his hand back to my coat-sleeve, and he was clutching it as if skippers for pleasure-cruisers were so scarce that he was afraid of losing a valuable capture. His attitude and the wheedling expression he tried to impart to his cunning old face were so ludicrous that I laughed as I said—

"Certainly I will come—at once if you like. I am probably a good bit more anxious to see if the billet will suit than you are, Mr. Nathan."

Still keeping his hand on my arm he led me into the street, talking all the while, and I could not help thinking of the Jew crimps early in the century, so pleased did he seem with himself for having discovered me. This seemed so strange, in face of the fact that trade was dull and unemployed steamer captains as thick as blackberries, that I ventured to remark upon it as I went along.

"Ah, yes, my son; there are plenty of captains," he chuckled, "but not the right sort for the *Queen of Night*. I can read faces, and you are the only man I have seen in a fortnight likely to fill the bill. We

## A NEW BERTH.

want one with a dash and a style about him, to make the ship a little paradise to the passengers."

"You would have had more to choose from if you had advertised instead of sticking up a notice which only a few will see," I said.

"That is so, my friend, but there are reasons," he replied. "The *Queen of Night* is now become very popular, and her late captain was a favourite. It might affect receipts if it were known that there had been a change."

We had now turned out of Fenchurch Street into a narrow thoroughfare with gloomy old-fashioned houses on either side—once the abodes of thriving citizens, but now let out in suites of offices from cellar to garret. Halfway down the alley my conductor stopped at a door on which, among several others, was fixed a brass plate bearing the inscription :—

"OCEAN STEAM-YACHT 'QUEEN OF NIGHT.'

NATHAN AND CO., AGENTS.

(And at 420, Pall Mall.)"

This is only where the management of the ship is carried on : the passenger-booking is done at the West-end branch," Mr. Nathan explained, as he dived into the dark, musty-smelling entry, and proceeded to lead the way up a worm-eaten oak staircase to the first floor. Producing a key, he unlocked a door on the landing and invited me to follow him in. The room wherein I found myself was only some

fifteen feet square, furnished with an ink-splashed table and three or four common chairs, and it had the appearance of being but an outer office, for there was a second door at the far end leading, I presumed, to an inner room of the same suite. The distempered walls were dirty, and quite bare except where a few tattered maps and charts were hanging.

My new acquaintance set a chair for me, and, seating himself at the table, took a sheet of paper on which he jotted down notes of the answers I gave to his questions. My name, and the dates of my master's certificate and previous employments were duly recorded, and then he asked me why I had left the service of the Flower Line.

"Because I broke a rule—left the bridge without being relieved," I replied, not caring to go into particulars unless he pressed for them. Somehow I was averse to mixing up Aline in such a sordid matter as my discharge. I little knew then how much depended on his ignorance or knowledge of the episode of the rescue.

My answer seemed to satisfy him; at any rate he showed no curiosity about details. "Breach of regulashuns, eh?" he croaked. "Nothing very serious in that. Can you get me a letter from the Company saying that, barring that, you have been an efficient officer and assiduous in your duties?"

I replied that I had no doubt I could. In fact the directors had told me that they would do all in their

power to aid my endeavours to obtain employment by testifying to my general capacity.

"Very well, Captain," he said. "I think it will be all sherenè, but I must consult with my partners. I am not alone in this business of entertaining the public on the briny waves. Wait here about half-an-hour while I run out, and p'raps when I come back I shall have some news for you."

He handed me a *Daily Telegraph* to pass the time, and soon the sound of his shuffling footsteps died away on the stairs, leaving the room very still. You can be sure I didn't trouble that newspaper much. I was far too busy congratulating myself on the sudden turn my affairs seemed to have taken; and, eager as I was to see Aline, I rejoiced that my reluctance to go to her in the character of a cast-off had turned my step eastward in search of work before seeking her. Now, if this curious old Jew's "partners" proved complacent, I should be able to go to her full-blown "Captain Forrester," in command of a 7,000-ton steamer, and with pockets in a fair way to be well lined. Nothing as yet had been said about rate of pay, but I knew that these pleasure-cruiser people gave good wages. I began to have visions of Sir Simon Crawshay receiving me with open arms and giving his consent to our immediate union, and it was pleasant to think that indirectly I owed my promotion to Aline. Truly, I thought, the "little cherub that sits up aloft" had shifted the wind into the right quarter for me at last.



Thus busy was I with pleasant anticipations when the sound of a slight cough caused me to start and look towards the door which Mr. Nathan had only partially closed. Standing there, half inside the room, a man was regarding me with an amused expression in a pair of the shrewdest eyes I have ever seen. He was spare of build, with close-cropped hair turning to iron-grey; but for all his slightness and fifty years, he gave me the impression that he would be an ugly customer if called on to take care of himself. His frame was wiry, and the hand that held open the door looked as hard as steel. There was something about the man to inspire trust and reliance even before he opened his mouth.

"Are you in charge of this office?" he asked, when he had attracted my attention. He had a scarcely perceptible American accent which would have escaped general notice.

I explained that I held no position there, but that Mr. Nathan, for whom I was myself waiting, would shortly return.

"Ah, it is not important," he said, coming a few paces into the room. "I was under the impression that the *Queen of Night* offices were in the West-end, and chancing to see the name on the door here as I passed, I thought I would get to the bottom of my error."

"You made no error; they have a branch in Pall Mall for booking purposes," I said. "This is where they do the victualling, buying stores, engaging officers, and all that sort of thing."

"I see; well, as my business, if any, has to do with the booking department it is of no use to wait here," he said carelessly. "I haven't decided yet, but it's on the cards that I might take a trip in this boat. I've just finished a big bit of work, and I am over here to recreate."

"You hail from the States?" I said.

"So! you've spotted the twang," he laughed pleasantly. "That is a sad blow, for I rather pride myself on not being branded too visibly with the Yankee trade-mark. But then you have a good deal of experience of Americans I should surmise, if you'll allow me to draw a deduction from your attire. Been in an Atlantic liner, eh?"

"I served in the Cunard some years ago," I said. Then, fearing that I had been rude, I added: "There is very little twang about a Southerner, and I should take you for one."

"Yes, I am from the Southern States," he replied. "My name is Kennard—Franklin Kennard. Possibly you have heard of it?"

I was obliged to confess that I had not.

"Ah, your knowledge of America and the Americans is not very deep-rooted after all," he said, with a curious smile. "Am I right in supposing that you are an officer of the *Queen of Night*? I ask because in that case we may have the pleasure of improving our acquaintance."

"Not at present, though I may be. I am a candidate for the command of the vessel, and have to get

"Well, then, good luck to you, and *au revoir*," he said, nodding farewell. "If I decide on the trip, I will book at the West-end office, and shall hope to meet you on board."

He went out, leaving the door as he had found it—shut to, but not fastened—and the next moment I heard his footsteps briskly descending the stairs. He must have got some way down, to a place where there was a turn, when there reached me in quick succession a hurried cry of surprise, a smothered oath, and the unmistakable clicking sound that is made by the cocking of a pistol. The footsteps had ceased suddenly, and then a voice which I did not know said: "I've got you covered; if you touch me I shoot." To this there came the prompt answer in the cool tones of the American's voice: "You are alarming yourself needlessly; I am not concerned with you—at present."

There followed silence for the space of thirty seconds, and then the footsteps went on again, only multiplied now by others ascending, while those going down, presumably those of the American, grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away. The episode had all passed so quickly that I had had no time for interference, or even to decide whether I ought to interfere; but now that it was over, I was seized with curiosity as to the other party to that strange meeting on the stairs. It was not Nathan, for I should have recognised the voice. Was Kennard's interlocutor bound for the office in

which I was seated, I wondered, or for one of the other suites on that or the higher floors.

I was not kept long in doubt. The footsteps passed by the door, and came to an end further along the landing. I had started forward in my chair, ready for emergencies; but finding that the gentleman who was so handy with his pistol was not coming my way, I settled down again to wait for Nathan's return. Five minutes passed and I was beginning to be impatient, when suddenly I experienced the sensation that some unseen person was watching me. Without vanity, I may safely say that I do not know what "nerves" are, and I certainly was not alarmed by the feeling; but there it was all the same—the feeling that I was an object of interest to human eyes.

I got up and opened the door wide, but there was no one to be seen on the landing. Coming back into the room I saw that it was clearly impossible for any one to have been looking at me through the window, which opened with a clear drop of twenty feet into the court below. The office itself obviously had no other tenant than myself. The instinct, however, remained strong upon me, and I gazed round the room vaguely in quest of its origin till some strange attraction drew my eyes to a map that was hanging on the wall between the office and the inner room. In the map I found, or thought I had found, the cause. Regarding me with a stony glare from two slits in the coloured portion of the canvas,

I seemed to see a pair of steel-blue eyes which, as they met mine, were instantly withdrawn. I sprang forward and examined the map, which was a large-scale one of Southern Europe. There were the slits right enough—fair and square in the middle of the Black Sea—but there were no eyes and no place where they could have been. I poked my finger through the slits, and came in contact with nothing but the plastered wall, which was smooth and solid, and apparently without a break.

I was about to lift the map to explore further when my attention was arrested by the voice of Mr. Nathan from the doorway.

"Ah, Captain," he said, with the throaty chuckle that was one of his peculiarities, as he came in and seated himself at his desk; "can't you keep from hankering after the tools of your trade, eh? Well, I think that you may take it as settled that you have the ship—provided the Flower people speak for you. If you'll call here to-morrow morning at ten I'll have the appointment all ship-shape and in order, and you won't have cause to quarrel with our terms."

My good luck drove all thought of those peeping eyes from my head, and I had already begun to believe myself mistaken. Away, too, flew all remembrance for the time of the American, Kennard: all that my mind was capable of holding just then was an intense desire to get away to the West-end so that Aline could share my joy. So profuse was I in my acknowledgments that the little Jew shook

his yellow wrinkled hand at me in a sort of fantastic deprecation.

"Keep your pretty speeches for the pathengers, my boy," he wheezed. "We want all our stock of sweets for the pathengers of the *Queen of Night*." And he rolled about and laughed as though at some huge joke visible only to himself.

## CHAPTER III.

### SIR SIMON'S NEWS.

ON leaving Mr. Nathan's office in Harp Alley, I went straight back to the more palatial domicile of the Flower Line, in Leadenhall Street, and had a brief but satisfactory interview with the General Manager. Instructions had been given by the Board that I was to be liberally treated in the matter of references, and when I left I was in possession of a letter which vouched for my competency in such glowing terms that I put away all further doubt about getting the berth. I was as good as captain of the *Queen of Night*.

Passing out into the street through the great swing-doors I felt, in homely phrase, as though I trod on air ; but as I was looking around for a smart hansom to take me to westward, a trivial incident—at least I thought it trivial then—served to bring me down to earth. Two well-dressed men were standing on the curb some few paces away, and one of them—the shorter—turned and looked at me. I instantly experienced the same kind of sensation that I had felt in Nathan's office, and, strangely enough,

I saw that the man's eyes were the exact counterpart of those which I had seen, or thought I had seen, gazing at me from the slit in the map. Their owner looked away again immediately, and, hooking his arm in that of his tall companion, walked away towards Cornhill.

In another minute I was bowling along in a hansom in the same direction, and soon passed the pair strolling leisurely and engaged in earnest conversation. If there had been any budding idea in my mind of a real connection between the incident at Nathan's and the incident in the street, it was quickly dismissed by the men's demeanour. They evinced no interest in surroundings, and on looking back after the cab had passed, I saw that even if the eyes had been identical, their owners were not sufficiently interested in me to follow. The two gentlemen were continuing their walk, and, as I looked, turned into a well-known bank.

"I am a bit jumpy to-day," I said to myself. "If I didn't know to the contrary, I should think I had taken the proverbial drop too much last night. The interview with those Board-room bogies and the process of getting the sack must have upset me more than I thought."

Pulling myself together, I once more dismissed the incident of the eyes as too ridiculous for serious consideration. As the cab sped along the Embankment I gave myself up to pleasant anticipations of the coming meeting, and by the time it drew up in



Grosvenor Square I had forgotten everything but Aline—Aline, the sweetheart whom I had wrested from the sea. But when I had paid my fare and stood before the house, my spirits received something of a damper, and I realised for the first time that even unprejudiced persons might see presumption, or what was worse, self-interest, in my courtship. That stately mansion, with its lordly frontage and imposing air of wealth, was hardly the sort of abode in which merchant-captains were wont to woo their brides.

However, "faint heart ne'er won fair lady," and I wasn't going to turn tail and run away from brown stucco and grand brass door-fittings. I mounted the steps and rang the bell, hardly decided till the door was opened, and a pompous butler stood before me, whether to ask for Aline or her guardian. Then I went full steam ahead, and inquired plump and straight whether Miss Challenor was at home.

The reply was a disappointment. "Miss Challenor is at Brighton, sir, and does not return till early next week. After that, I believe, she goes abroad for some time."

"Is Sir Simon in?" I asked.

"Yes, sir : will you please to step this way."

He showed me into a small room on the ground floor, and went to take my card to the baronet. While he was gone I tried to come to a conclusion as to what I should do, and I decided to be guided by circumstances. If Sir Simon was friendly I would

broach the subject of my love for Aline: if the reverse, I would wait and consult with Aline herself before taking a course which would compromise her and cause unpleasantness between her and her guardian.

The butler had not closed the door, and from where I stood I could see part of the hall and the foot of the grand staircase. In about two minutes I heard people coming down the stairs, and soon the butler came into view, apparently escorting some previous caller whom he was about to show to the front door at the conclusion of a visit. I was so placed that I could only see passers-by as they traversed the last two steps of the stairs, and the butler was out of my vision in a second. Without feeling any special interest in the visitor—except that I suppose, in a vague sort of way, a lover's jealousy made me curious about *all* visitors to that house—I waited for him to go by. There must have been an interval of half a dozen steps between the two, for the second descender of the stairs came with the shambling gait of age, and when he did appear was longer in my sight than the manservant. Hence there was no shadow of doubt this time as to the reality of the coincidence that startled me.

*Sir Simon's visitor was none other than Nathan, the Jew owner of the Queen of Night, my new employer.*

I hurried to the room-door and looked after the retreating figure as it passed out of the house. He had his back to me now, but what I saw amply con-

firmed my recognition of the leering, wizened face. He was in the act of putting on a regular three-decker of a top-hat—a piece of headgear which, from the peculiarity of its construction, had specially attracted my attention in the City.

There was no time for conjecture or surmise as to the nature of his business with Sir Simon. The butler approached me with a request to follow him to his master's presence, and leading me up the broad staircase he ushered me into a snug apartment, half smoking-room, half library. Sir Simon was sitting at an escritoire, occupied in blotting a counterfoil in a cheque-book, which, upon my entrance, he folded up and thrust into a drawer. The next moment he had risen, and was greeting me, to my surprise, as warmly as was possible to one of his aristocratic temperament.

"Quite a pleasure, I am sure, Mr. Forrest—or Forrester, was it," he said, shaking me by the hand, and showing his false teeth in one of his made-to-order smiles. "Sit down, and take one of these cigars. Have you been fishing any more young ladies out of the sea lately?"

I responded as well as I could to his intended civility, and then asked after Aline's health without telling him that I knew of her absence from town. As there was no chance of my seeing her then, he might as well take my visit as meant for himself, I thought.

"My poor ward is very far from well, I regret to

say," was the disquieting reply that set my heart beating. "She has never really got over the shock of her sudden immersion. I have sent her down to Brighton in the hope that the change might benefit her, but it has had the contrary effect. My sister, Mrs. Beauchamp, who is with her, reports that she is in a very low state indeed."

This was grievous news, and I was at a loss to understand it. Though Aline had lost consciousness in the water, she was to all appearances perfectly well the next day, and during the remainder of her stay on the *Dahlia* she had continued the picture of radiant health. I expressed my deep concern and asked for her Brighton address, so that I might run down and pay my respects in person.

The request was no sooner made than I perceived the real reason of the baronet's affability in his knowledge that Aline was inaccessible to me. He promptly refused to give the address, and there was an ugly sneer in his tone as he did so.

"That, I fear, is quite out of the question—seeing that you are the very last person she ought to see," he said. "Why, the sight of you would recall the occurrence which is the cause of her nervous prostration, and which it is desirable that she should forget."

"She won't do that," I answered sharply, for his latest demeanour nettled me. "And, look here, Sir Simon," I added, stung to a premature declaration by the evil smile with which he received my answer,

"I can give you a very good reason why Miss Challenor will not be so forgetful. You may as well know it first as last: she has promised to be my wife."

I believe, and always shall believe, that this was the first intimation he had had that there was anything between Aline and myself, though others think that he had suspected it and had adopted the measures presently to be disclosed because of that suspicion. From his point of view there was cause enough without that; and at least his manner was that of a man completely taken by surprise. Sir Simon Crawshay was as wicked a scoundrel as any who will appear in these pages, but he had not the professional subtlety of some whom we are about to meet. He started forward, flushing deeply; then sank back in his chair, laughing outright.

"My dear sir," he sniggered at length, "it is a pity you are not in the Royal Navy instead of in the merchant service. You would be just the man to lead forlorn hopes and cutting-out expeditions. Do you know that my ward is an heiress, entitled to something like a quarter of a million on attaining her majority."

I confess I was staggered, but I replied boldly: "I did not know it. If I had been aware of Miss Challenor's great fortune I should never have courted her. As it is, the knowledge comes too late to make any difference, for we have plighted our troth."

"And you are willing to take the quarter of a

million thrown in—just a trifling extra detail,” he sneered, implying that I knew of Aline’s wealth all along. “Come, Mr. Forrester, you must see that I can never give my consent to such an engagement. I should fail in my duty as Miss Challenor’s guardian if I listened for one moment to your proposal. I——”

“Wait a minute,” I interrupted; “I have had promotion since we met on the *Dahlia*. I am now captain, and——”

“It makes no difference: pray spare me the interesting particulars,” he interposed in turn. “No promotion in your rather obscure branch of a precarious profession would entitle you to aspire to my ward’s hand. When do you go to sea again?”

Wondering at the abrupt question, I named the 15th of the month, which was the day Nathan had mentioned as the probable date of sailing.

“The 15th,” he repeated. “Well, then, there’ll be no harm in my telling you Miss Challenor’s future movements: it may save you a lot of trouble in hanging about here. She remains at Brighton till the 14th, and on the following day—the date of your sailing, remember—she leaves England for six weeks. There can thus be no chance of your meeting, although you may perhaps see her through a telescope as you go down Channel. On the 15th my ward starts on a pleasure cruise, for the benefit of her health, in the ocean yacht *Queen of Night*.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE FACE AT THE GANGWAY.*

As I stood in the Victoria Docks, looking for the first time at the noble vessel I was to command, I will dare wager that there was not a happier man or a prouder man than the *Queen of Night's* new captain within a thousand miles—no, not even among those homeward-bound passengers debouching from the great “liner” in the next berth.

Her hull was painted a pale yellow, or cream-colour, her two funnels the same, and her brass-work glittered like burnished gold. She was bigger than any other steamer in the dock, and from her yacht-like smartness would have been taken rather for a Navy ship than for a liner, were it not that the bright flowers and tropical plants displayed on her decks suggested war as little as commerce.

I repeat that I was a proud and happy man that morning. The ship was the cause of my pride, and need I say that my happiness sprang from the knowledge that she was to be Aline's home as well as mine for the next six weeks. Sir Simon Crawshay's announcement—made in all ignorance of my appoint-

ment to the *Queen of Night*—that my dear girl was to be one of her passengers on the coming trip had seemed almost too good to be true. But that it was true I gathered from his succeeding sentences, and I said nothing to disturb his ignorance. Not knowing what was the real—the terribly real—meaning of this pleasure-cruise, I could have shouted with laughter, and had hard work to compose my face as the baronet went on to discuss the merits of the vessel I was to command. All that my silly nautical brain could grasp was, firstly, that I was besting Sir Simon, and, secondly, that Nathan's visit to Grosvenor Square was explained by business connected with the trip. I did not pause to wonder why the passage had not been booked in the ordinary way at the West-end office.

I concealed my triumph as best I could under an air of bitter chagrin, and as soon as possible took my leave, the one great hope in my heart being that Sir Simon would not discover my appointment to the *Queen of Night* before the steamer sailed. I did not know whether he was to accompany his ward, but that mattered little. If the ship could only get away without his knowing who the captain was, Aline and I would have at any rate six clear days together before any one could land at Gibraltar—the first port of call. From what Nathan had let drop I gathered that the owners were not anxious to advertise the change of captains among the clients, so I thought there was every chance of gaining my object.



The testimonial of the Flower Line proved satisfactory to Nathan, and now here I was, on the day after the events recorded in the previous chapter, taking my first view of the "floating palace," as the advertisements called it, that had been committed to my charge. I had hurried down to the Docks the moment the letter had been approved and the appointment ratified. The little Jew had given me a note of introduction to the surgeon of the ship—Dr. Zavertal—whom he said I should find living on board, and he further admonished me to get on as well as I could with the doctor, as the medico of a vessel frequented largely by invalids in quest of health was necessarily an important personage.

"You will find him a nice-spoken, easy shentleman to sail with, but you had better let him have his way in anything outside the navigation of the ship," Nathan had said on handing the letter, and then he had emphasised the words by adding significantly, "Them's *instructions*, remember."

As there still remained nearly a week before the date of departure, no signs of bustle or activity were as yet apparent on the steamer, which lay alongside the wharf with her gang-plank out, and only one or two men visible on deck engaged in polishing and painting. Nathan had told me that the main portion of the crew would not be shipped till two days before sailing, and that I should only find on board the officers and a few permanent hands who were retained to keep things ship-shape. Even the

business of taking in the stores had not yet commenced.

Having satisfied myself with a general view of the vessel, I picked my way towards her across the lumber-strewn quay, and I was about to step on to the gang-plank when for the third time the uneasy feeling that had moved me in the office of Nathan & Co. took hold of me. Instinctively raising my eyes, I saw that a man was leaning over the rails by the gangway, watching my progress with quiet interest. He wore a gold-braided cap with a peak, and from this and his dark-blue brass-buttoned frock coat I judged him to be one of the officers. That, however, was not the cause of the thrill that ran through me. Rather was it that the face was the face of the man who had turned and looked at me outside the Flower offices in Leadenhall Street, and that the eyes were the eyes which had then so vividly recalled the mysterious slits in Nathan's chart of the Black Sea.

But the strange part of this last meeting—whether it was really the second or the third I could not say—was that, as his eyes met mine and I returned look for look, the uneasy feeling left me at once, and I wondered at myself for ever having entertained it. He began beaming at me with a genial smile of good-fellowship that promised the most friendly relations, and almost immediately sang out—

"Step aboard, sir. Welcome to the *Queen of Night*."

Quickly crossing the plank I found him waiting at the other end to receive me, when he added—

“A passenger to view the ship?”

I was dressed in plain clothes, so that the question was a perfectly natural one—provided that I had been mistaken about the eyes in the map and that his presence outside the Flower offices had been accidental. There was certainly nothing in his demeanour to show that he had ever seen me before or that he was not thoroughly above-board.

“No,” I said. “My name is Forrester—Captain Forrester. I have been appointed to command the ship. I have a letter here for Dr. Zavertal.”

“My dear Captain, I am delighted to be the first to receive you,” he said, shaking me warmly by the hand. “I am Dr. Zavertal. Come into my den and refresh yourself; or perhaps you would prefer to make your tour of inspection first?”

I told him that I should be very glad to begin with a chat, and he led the way to his deck-cabin amidships, glancing at Nathan's open letter of introduction on the way. The combination of surgery and study into which he showed me was, like every other portion of the steamer, luxuriously furnished and softly upholstered. The walls were match-boarded with some costly polished wood, and the floor was thickly carpeted. On the two seaward sides were plate-glass windows instead of the usual circular lights. At the fore end were fixed the shelves for drugs and medical appliances, while right across the

after part of the cabin hung a gorgeous curtain shutting off the doctor's sleeping apartments: A canary and a couple of gaudy parrakeets twittered in gilded cages, and there were bright flowers everywhere.

"Snug quarters, Doctor," I said, coming to an anchor in a huge club armchair, while he busied himself with glasses and decanters.

"Yes; it's not a bad crib for a struggling medico, is it?" he assented jovially. "You see my department is the health, happiness, and comfort of the passengers. I couldn't keep them healthy, happy, and comfortable if I wasn't all that myself—so I do myself well."

"I can understand that you have your hands full," I replied. "The doctor on a regular liner hasn't too soft a time of it: on a ship full of health-seekers you must almost need an assistant."

A wink seemed now quite natural to those smiling eyes which had struck me with such a queer chill at first, and Doctor Zavertal winked as he said, "Oh, don't run away with that idea, Captain. They're not so sick as all that. Only about ten per cent. each voyage are what you might call invalids, and of them not more than half are bad cases. This is a very gay ship, I can tell you. Nathan will have said as much?"

"Yes; he seemed to set as much store on social qualities in his skipper as on seamanship," I replied.

"Well, hardly that. It is a combination of the

two that is indispensable in our line of business," said Zavertal. "Old Nathan is a sharp man. If you'll allow me to say so, Captain Forrester, I think he's got the article he wants. At any rate, you look the part."

It crossed my mind that to "look the part" was about all that would be required of me in the character of a Master of the Ceremonies, if what the little Jew had told me was correct—that Zavertal himself bore the brunt of the entertaining. That would suit me very well, for I was never a lady's man, and should much social philandering be expected of me my appointment would not be likely to be a durable one.

"Well, Doctor," I said, "after all I'm here to sail the ship, and that must be my first care. I have no doubt that with you to *do* the social part I shall be able to *look* it all right."

He waved his hand deprecatingly, as though pleased that I had no intention of usurping functions which he had been in the habit of performing; and then for the fraction of a second his eyes hardened, and there came into them that peculiar glint which had startled me as he stood on the curb in the City street. It was as if he shot one keen glance to probe my honesty of purpose and was satisfied, for the look passed and the eyes smiled again. Let me say here that though I was this man's nominal chief and he treated me with proper deference, yet I felt from the first that his was the influence which, with

the owners and passengers, if we ever came to a conflict, would prevail.

We smoked and chatted for half an hour, and then I asked him to show me over the ship and introduce me to the other officers. To the first proposition he agreed with alacrity; the second was out of his power, as the three mates were living on shore during the steamer's stay in port. The chief officer was expected next day, but at present the ship was in charge of the bo'sun. I made the acquaintance of this honest sailor-man, and was conducted by him from stem to stern, the result of the inspection being that never had I seen a better found and equipped vessel, with more generous owners honestly desirous of promoting the comfort of the passengers and crew. Doctor Zavertal accompanied me through the after part of the ship, but after a while he left me with the bo'sun, who took advantage of his absence to fire off a volley of eloquence on the benefit of serving such a firm as Nathan & Co. in such a craft as the *Queen of Night*.

"Jest a sea-goin' 'otel, she is," was the bo'sun's verdict. "Plenty of vittles, lib'ral grog, and every one to enjoy theirselves—'fore the mast and in the cabin. It may be kindness of 'art, or it may be the way the owners takes to make 'em forget the funerals. I don't say but what it ain't a bit of both, but it makes a live ship anyway."

"To forget the funerals! What on earth do you mean, my man?" I exclaimed.

"Well, you see, sir," said the bo'sun, hitching up his trousers, "there be some as come aboard the *Queen* in search of 'elth as finds the other thing. Bound to be above the average of sea-burials on a craft as is in a manner of speaking a 'elth resort as well as a big yacht. You may have observed, sir, that 'elth-resorts is mostly the parrydises of the on'elthy."

My bo'sun was evidently a philosopher, and gruesome as was the idea, I could well understand that it might not be altogether groundless. There is nothing more depressing than a funeral at sea, and the owners would be quite likely to do their best to counteract this influence by infusing as much gaiety as possible into the life of the ship. But surely, I asked, the passengers were not in the habit of dying wholesale?

"Lor bless you, no, Captain," was the reassuring reply. "Sometimes one, sometimes two, but never more than three or four a voyage. That's not bad out of three or four hundred, and it ain't always the sickest as snuffs it the quickest, neither."

We made our way aft again along the main deck, taking the engine-room with its slumbering "triple-expansion," "twin-screw" giants *en route*. In passing along I could not fail to be struck with the beautiful fittings of the state-rooms, with the electric light and electric bells everywhere, while the cooks' quarters with their shining copper utensils and cool marble slabs, the great ice-chambers, and the sand

room, now empty save for rows of uniform coats and the bright brass instruments, claimed my admiration in turn. As for the grand saloon, music-room, and smoking-room, though I had sailed in many crack liners I had never seen anything to equal the lavish splendour of the decorations in white and gold, the costly pictures, and tasteful harmony of colouring that prevailed.

Mounting to the upper deck, Simmons, the bo'sun, showed me my own cabin, which was situated under the main-bridge, next the chart-room. It was a large, comfortably furnished apartment, having a bedstead, instead of a bunk, in a curtained alcove, and good enough for a lady's boudoir. I had never been berthed liked that before, and as I looked at the cushioned couches and easy chairs I remember feeling positively afraid lest I should grow "soft" amid so much luxury.

Outside my cabin I dismissed Simmons from further attendance, and went towards the surgery to take leave of Doctor Zavertal before quitting the ship. Approaching his cabin from forward, I had to step on several coils of rope that had not yet been stowed, and these so deadened my footfall that I reached the door without giving any warning sound. Owing to this cause I overheard a few words of conversation which I now know were not intended for my ears.

"If this cursed American really means to go the trip I should indeed be glad to have you with me,"



Doctor Zavertal was saying. "But how about your schemes for the subsequent voyage?"

"They would have to go by the board for this once," came the reply, in a well-modulated, gentlemanly voice. "We have done so well that we can afford to lose our special profits on one trip. "What we can't afford to do is to take risks."

At this point I stepped into the cabin, and found the doctor with a tall, finely-built fellow, who had apparently not long arrived, for he stood just inside the door and was in the act of removing his gloves. Neither he nor the doctor showed any apprehension of having been overheard, but the latter said quickly—

"Ah, so you have completed the round of the ship, Captain? This gentleman, Mr.—thank you, I did not quite catch the name—Mr. Vizard, is a possible passenger, and has come to have a look at our accommodation."

"I hope he will be as pleased with it as I have been," I replied, bowing to the stranger.

"This is Captain Forrester, who has just been appointed to the command," explained Zavertal.

Mr. Vizard had been regarding me with a rather critical stare, but on the introduction being made mutual he smiled politely and remarked that he hoped to have a pleasant voyage in the *Queen of Night* under my auspices. I made the proper sort of reply, and having arranged to take up my abode on the steamer on the following day, I bade them both good-day, and went ashore.

"But why," I asked myself, as I passed through the dock gates, "did Zavertal hesitate in giving Vizard's name—as though to convey the impression that it was unknown to him?"

The answer was beyond me, for I was ready to swear that they were not strangers to each other. *Vizard was the man who had been with Zavertal in Leadenhall Street on the previous day.* And who was "the cursed American," and what did "risks" and "special profits" mean?

## CHAPTER V.

### *THE MISSING PASSENGERS.*

THE day appointed for the departure of the *Queen of Night* broke fair and sunny, and the hour of noon found us all in trim to receive the passengers. A crew fit for a man-of-war had been shipped, the steward's department was in full working order under its permanent chief, and the storerooms were crammed with all the delicacies in and out of season. There was little of the bustle customary on the sailing of a big steamer—first because we carried no cargo, and secondly because there was no heavy baggage to be shipped. A cabin-trunk or two generally sufficed each passenger for the six weeks' cruise, and these they brought with them.

We were not due to warp out of dock till three, but the first-comers began to arrive in time for the luncheon that had been announced as ready for passengers and their friends at one o'clock in the grand saloon. As captain of the ship it was beneath my dignity to receive our guests in person as they came on board, but Doctor Zavertal was literally a "host in

himself," welcoming, assisting, and directing every one—a duty in which he was ably assisted by the purser and stewards. This arrangement suited me admirably. I had ascertained from the passenger-list that Sir Simon Crawshay had not booked a passage for himself, Aline having for a travelling-companion a certain Mrs. Brinkworth, of whom I had never heard. But there was the chance that the baronet would accompany his ward to the steamer for the purpose of seeing her off, and my great fear was lest he should take her ashore again and forfeit her passage on finding that I was in command of the ship.

To obviate any such discovery I kept my own room while the passengers were arriving, and it was fortunate that circumstances favoured my doing so, without attracting attention. Apart from the fact that the doctor was making himself so useful, I had a reasonable excuse for remaining out of sight in the necessity of sticking to my desk for the signing of reports and orders, as well as of holding an interview with Nathan to receive final instructions. There would be nothing to call me to the bridge till the bell rang "all clear."

The windows of the captain's room gave a clear view of the quay-side and of the gangway, and you may be sure that never on dark and dirty night did I keep a sharper look-out than I did for my girl's sweet face that day. Like most good things she was "lang o' comin'." Troops of smart people thronged

gaily over the plank to the gangway where our courteous purser stood to check the passenger-list, the popping of champagne corks from the saloon told that the farewell luncheon had begun, but as yet there was no sign of Aline. Presently Nathan's shambling footsteps were heard outside, and he entered my cabin to furnish me with a list of places where I was to call and of the firms I was to deal with, and I had hard work to give him my attention and to watch the gangway at the same time.

He was sitting by my side at the cabin table with his papers before him, emphasising his instructions with the tip of a strong cigar, which served the double purpose of a pointer. His ferrety eyes shifted from the paper to my face and back again perpetually, noting whether or no I understood his points. It was while he was searching for some particulars relating to his agent at Malta that my heart bounded at the sight of Aline coming across the gang-plank, followed by a good-looking, ladylike woman of about thirty. I had barely time to notice that my girl looked pale and sad, and to indulge the glad hope that, rather than to illness, it was due to a cause which would soon be dissipated, when a wheezing chuckle at my elbow recalled me to the desirability of concealing my emotions. I was half afraid that I had not done so, for Nathan was regarding me with a sardonic leer.

"I see that you are an admirer of female beauty, my gay captain," he said, glancing significantly to-

wards the gangway; "or perhaps you have met that charming young creature before?"

"A little of each, sir," I replied, with assumed indifference. "I know a pretty face when I see one, and I think I have some slight acquaintance with the young lady who has just come aboard. That is," I added, "if I am right in recognising her as a Miss Challenor, the ward of Sir Simon Crawshay."

Nathan shrugged his shoulders with an air of unconcern, but he still kept his eyes on mine as he answered: "Mosh likely that is her. A shentleman named Sir Simon Crawshay has booked passages for two ladies, I know. Ah, well, Captain," he continued, relaxing his gaze at last, "you had better make hay while the sun shines. Sir Simon will not be on board to shpoil shport."

He evinced no curiosity as to where and when I had first met Miss Challenor, and we resumed our business. Now that I was assured of Sir Simon's absence I was able to give my owner an undivided attention, with the result that the remaining matters were quickly disposed of and Nathan left the cabin. He had scarcely gone when the chief officer, Mr. McIntyre, came to tell me that the pilot was aboard. I gave orders for the first bell to be rung to begin to clear the ship of passengers' friends, and then went up on to the bridge to direct the preparations for warping out. After a few words with the pilot and mates, I turned to scan the deck below for Aline. I was rewarded at once. She was standing with her

back to the railing on the side farthest from the quay, quite alone, and watching, with what I thought was a wistful interest, the first departures for the shore.

Telling the chief officer that I had caught sight of some friends and that I would be back directly, I hurried from the bridge and went aft to where Aline stood. Never shall I forget the look of glad wonder with which she started to me as I softly spoke her name and she realised by the smart uniform I was wearing that I was probably, as she naively put it, "going too." Let me be excused from recording the few words in which I confirmed that happy surmise, and those with which she received the news. Most of the people were still down in the saloon, doing justice to the farewell luncheon, and those on deck were busy with their own affairs, so that our meeting was more private than might have been expected in such a place.

"And now, dearest, what is this that Sir Simon tells me of your ill-health?" I asked, when I had briefly explained my position on the *Queen of Night*. "I thought you were looking a little sad just now, but you do not by any means justify the poor account he gave of you."

"There is absolutely nothing the matter with me, Cyril," she replied. "If I looked sad, the cause of it is all gone now. I was regretting having to leave England without seeing you, but the last few minutes have changed the prospect of the voyage into a dream of delight."

"But your guardian must have had some grounds for making such a statement, surely?" I persisted, though my anxiety was nearly quelled by the obvious truth of her own account of herself. Now that the sadness had left her face she was again the picture of radiant health.

"Oh, I expect the wish was father to the thought," she said lightly. "Sir Simon kept harping on my pallor and want of appetite—two utter fictions—so long that I almost began to believe in them myself. Do you know what I think his real motive was in sending me on this trip?"

"No : tell me," I said.

"I believe he suspected that there was something between us, and that he wanted to get me out of the way before your return," Aline said. "The steamer would have sailed a week ago, I am told, if they had found a new captain sooner. To think that it should be you!"

"Well, if that was his game, Sir Simon has been fairly sold," I laughed. "And now, dearest, I must run away. The skipper of a boat of this size has plenty to do on leaving port, and I may not see much of you for the next twenty-four hours. One question, though, who is your companion?"

"She is a Mrs. Brinkworth—Ella her Christian name is, and I call her by it already," was the reply. "My guardian engaged her specially to chaperon me on this trip—through an advertisement, I believe. I have only known her three days, but I like her much.



She has been unhappy in her married life—poor thing.”

“Do you trust her well enough to tell her of our engagement?” I asked, with a keen appreciation of the value of a friendly chaperon during the voyage.

“I have not told her yet, but I shall soon see,” Aline said, as, nodding gaily, she dismissed me to my duties.

It was time to finally clear the ship of strangers, and as soon as I reached the bridge I gave orders for the last warning bell to be rung. The lingerers at the saloon table came streaming up on deck, and the crowd quickly thinned as the friends and relatives of our passengers went streaming on to the quay. It was a festive scene, resembling more the close of some social function than the departure of a great steamer. The sadness of farewell so noticeable when a regular liner starts for a distant port was entirely absent in the case of a six-weeks' pleasure-cruise.

At last the chief officer reported “All clear,” and I was about to order “In gang-plank,” when the purser came running to the bridge ladder and announced that two passengers who had booked had not arrived. One was a Mr. Franklin Kennard of the United States, and the other Mr. Gaston Vizard of Park Lane. Would I wait for them?

In the rush and bustle of the past week I had almost forgotten the American who had appeared while I was waiting in Nathan's office, and who had had the curious *rencontre* on the stairs with some

unknown individual as he left. Vizard, of course, I remembered as the man whom I had seen on two occasions—once in Leadenhall Street, and again when I first came to see the ship. I was too busy to be struck with the coincidence that the only two intending passengers, besides Aline, of whom I had any previous knowledge, and both so far as I knew entirely unconnected with each other, should have failed to embark. All my mind was concentrated on getting the ship away as quickly as possible, and knowing that Zavertal was practically in charge of the passengers and would be aware whether any special circumstances called on me to wait for the two truants, I ran down to consult him.

In the last few days while living on board I had got very chummy with the Doctor; and, deciding to draw the "home cover" first, though hardly expecting to find him there, I did not hesitate in my haste to open the door of his cabin without knocking. Judge then of my surprise when, crossing the threshold, I not only heard Zavertal's voice but, as I thought, that of Mr. Vizard, who I had just been informed was not on the ship. Opening the door smartly I was still more astonished to see the doctor, quite alone, engaged in unpacking a parcel of drugs.

"I thought I heard Mr. Vizard's voice," I said, looking round blankly.

"Did you, Captain?" said Zavertal, looking up with his usual friendly smile. "I expect he is somewhere around on deck then."

"No," I answered; "I didn't see any one outside. I came to say that the purser reports him as not on board. Also another passenger who booked—a Mr. Kennard—has not turned up. What is the custom in such cases? Shall we give them a little law?"

"Well," said the doctor, in the confidentially respectful tone of a subordinate who desires to be really helpful, "that is for you to decide, sir; but if I may advise you in my private capacity, I should say *not*. The owners won't be inclined to blame you for a couple of forfeited passages, seeing that there will be two mouths less to fill. It has happened before, and the last captain never waited."

"That settles it then," I exclaimed, and returning to the bridge I gave the word to close the gangway and warp out of dock. So sure was I of having heard Vizard's voice that I suspected the doctor of a practical joke, and I was strengthened in the idea by having noticed a tremulous motion in the curtain that screened the bed-place from the surgery. I fully expected that Vizard, if not Kennard as well, would put in an appearance the first time the gong sounded for a meal.

But it was not so. Owing to the difficult navigation at the mouth of the river I had to stick to the bridge that night, and was unable to join the company in the saloon. After the meal was over, however, I sent for the purser and inquired if anything had been seen of either Mr. Kennard or Mr. Vizard.

"No, sir," was the reply ; "they are certainly not in the ship. Their cabins are unoccupied, and they were not at dinner. I have ticked them off as 'forfeits.'"

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE DOCTOR'S FIRST PATIENT.*

It was not till noon on the day after leaving port, when we were well down Channel at the back of the Isle of Wight, that I felt justified in handing over the care of the ship to the chief officer and in quitting the bridge. The day was fine, and the sea as calm as a duck-pond, so that nearly all the passengers were on deck enjoying the fresh salt air and busily engaged in forming new friendships which should last through the cruise. Already there were signs that one or two promising flirtations had arisen. The weather had tempted the ladies to put on their brightest summer costumes, every one had left their worries behind, and the scene was one of light laughter and brilliant colour.

I went first to my room to remove the traces of the long night watch and change my clothes. Having made my toilet I strolled aft, and soon found myself doing the civil to the best of my ability to the various groups under the awning, purposely abstaining from seeking Aline at first. It was no part of my plan to make her conspicuous, or to attract to her the gossip

which takes root so easily on shipboard. Zavertal was there, apparently in his element, introducing, advising, amusing—all in a breath—and as soon as he noticed my presence I saw that he was making the most of it. The words “the Captain” are magical ones at sea, and the owner of the title is an object of interest to all his nominal subjects to a quite unmerited degree.

“The captain—Captain Forrester,” I heard the doctor murmur in a deferential whisper, as I approached a bevy of smart folk congregated round an old gentleman seated in a deck-chair, who seemed to be telling funny stories. Zavertal’s announcement caused all eyes to be turned on me, and he proceeded aloud—

“Good morning, sir. You have had a long spell of work while the rest of us have been playing and sleeping, I am afraid.”

I returned his greeting, and, assuming the airs of a veteran skipper, I remarked that it was always my practice to take charge of the ship myself while in sight of land. Then I asked to be introduced to the other people around, and he pronounced a string of names, all immaterial to this story, though I got to be familiar enough with most of them in the next week or two. I do not know whether it was by intention, but Zavertal omitted to mention the old gentleman in the deck-chair, who promptly put on an expression of comic resentment.

“Why should you pass me over, Doctor,” he pro-

tested in a distinct American accent. "I guess you think my yarns would keep the captain from his duty, and that it would be safer for all parties if he didn't know me."

Zavertal looked at him, smiling with his lips; but, though the glance was not directed at me and I could not therefore be certain, I fancied that the cold glint was in his eyes as he answered—

"I am quite sure, sir, it would be very much safer if you always prove as amusing—to *me* at any rate—as you have this morning, though that was not really the reason why I was so rude as to fail to introduce you to the captain. The fact is, I am sorry to have to confess that you are one of the very few passengers whose names I am not yet quite certain about."

Was it that there was a half-tone in Zavertal's voice that suggested to me some subtle meaning in his words, or was it only that instinct was beginning to teach me to look for such unconsciously? I cannot say truly even now, but I know that the thought crossed my mind and caused me to pay closer attention to him whom he addressed. The passenger in the deck-chair, as I have said, was old, his appearance being that of seventy at least, even allowing for a liberal discount due to his lively briskness of manner. I had come across the type many times before in many ships, the gay "old dog" of a passenger who prefers young society of both sexes, and attracts it to himself by a pleasing personality and a fund of anecdote. This particular

specimen had a rubicund face shining, like a setting sun, amid luxuriant masses of snow-white hair ; his bright eyes twinkled humorously ; and he was dressed, rather young for his age, in a well-cut suit of light dittos surmounted by a white Panama straw hat.

If there was any hidden meaning in the doctor's speech, the snowy-haired passenger showed no sign of suspecting it. Raising his hat lightly, more especially to me, but so as to include the general company, he said—

"Emerson C. Waldo, sir, is my name—General Waldo, late of the United States Cavalry—on a Yurup tour for the benefit of health and education. I reckon I've powerfully neglected both, sir, in my time, having mostly spent my life in fighting Indians on the plains."

"Well, General," I said, "I hope that you will make up for lost time, and get all the arrears of enjoyment due to you on the *Queen of Night*. It's not in the contract, but we mean to give you fine weather, smooth seas, and, when we get down south, blue skies—if we can. We start fair anyhow."

I remained chatting a minute or two, and when I moved away, Zavertal separated from the group and joined me in a promenade of the deck.

"You have been so occupied, sir, that I have got the start of you with the passengers," he said. "I may as well take the opportunity of posting you in what I have picked up. They are an average lot."



"Many invalids?" I asked, with a vivid remembrance of the bo'sun's reference to "sea-funerals." Though my question seemed almost silly amid that scene of gaiety and robust health.

"A few, but not many serious cases. There, though you might not think it, is one of them," the doctor replied, pointing to a happy-looking, chubby-faced boy of fourteen who was amusing some of the elders by skylarking on the lower ratlins. "That is the young Earl of Darranmore, who, if he ever attains his majority, will possess a rent-roll of forty thousand a year. I fear that the lad is doomed, though—heart complications." And Zavertal sighed sympathetically as we wheeled for another turn.

"That is hard lines," I said. "Are there any others about whom you are anxious?"

"There's a man called Desmond Orlebar whom I doubt if we shall bring home again. He has gone the pace and got himself into a generally played-out condition. There he is—sitting wrapped up on the other side of the deck, and indulging in his old games to the last, I see."

Following the direction of his glance, I saw a thin, sallow-faced man of forty, wearing a thick plaid ulster and propped up with pillows on a portable bamboo lounge. A steward had just brought him a mahogany-coloured brandy and soda, and Mr. Orlebar's efforts to take the glass from the tray into his shaking hands were painful to witness. There was no doubt about this passenger's illness.

"Poor beggar," I said. "And does that complete the list of dangerous cases?"

"Of the really dangerous ones, yes," replied Zavertal. "There are one or two other patients who came to me with bad reports from their relations or private medical attendants, but I see no reason to be apprehensive about any of them—except perhaps one."

"Who is that?" I asked, somewhat carelessly; I fear, as we reached the limit of our promenade at the stern. Facing about, we both turned inwards to each other, so that as Zavertal answered my question, his eyes for a moment dwelt on mine. Again they had that strange glint.

"She is a Miss Challenor," was the reply that so startled me, that it would have been affectation on his part to have pretended not to notice its palpable effect. He hastened to add: "I rather fancy Nathan, before he went ashore, told me that you had met her."

"Yes, in a way I may be said to have saved her life," I replied, and seeing no reason for further concealing a fact which was sure to get abroad in the ship, I briefly narrated the circumstances, only suppressing my present relations with Aline. "But surely," I concluded, "there must be some mistake about the state of Miss Challenor's health. I had a few words with her yesterday, and she laughed at the idea of there being anything the matter with her."

We turned again, and again I met the doctor's gaze

piercing me from out of a face that smiled with sad benevolence in every feature but the eyes. "The old story," he said, sympathetically. "Every one concedes the danger but the patient herself. I have not been called on to examine her yet, but her guardian wrote that it was an almost hopeless case of pulmonary-phthisis. I presume her friends thought it unnecessary to frighten the poor girl by letting her know the nature and extent of her malady. However, as you take a very natural interest in her, I will observe closely and let you know in a day or two. Excuse me, but I think I am wanted—and, Captain, if you will allow me to advise, you will turn in for a spell. Your night-watch has taken it out of you, and you look as if you needed rest."

Needed rest! As he left my side to go to some one who was beckoning to him, the sun seemed to be blotted out, and the voices and laughter around made a horrid blur in my ears like the "racing" of machinery when the main-shaft breaks. To think that Aline—my sweet Aline in the heyday of her youth and beauty, and in the height of our new-found happiness—was dying of consumption. Then gradually the weight of sudden oppression was lifted, and, reaction setting in, I would not, could not, believe that the trouble existed at all. I recalled what Aline had said about the "wish being father to the thought" with Sir Simon, and I began to suspect that he had imagined what, probably from interested motives, he desired to become a reality. It was the first inkling

of the truth, but how far short of it the events to be related must show.

The wind was light and steady from the east, and the glass high. We were clanking down Channel at an easy sixteen knots, with the massive front of the Mainbench cliffs glistening white in the sunlight five miles away on the starboard beam. There was nothing to keep me on deck, and having satisfactorily explained away the cause of my anxiety, I decided to take Zavertal's advice and turn in till dinner-time, leaving him to do the honours at the luncheon-table. In going to my room I had to pass the spot where Mr. Orlebar's lounge was placed, and just as I was approaching it I met Aline's chaperon, as yet unknown to me, coming along the deck alone from the opposite direction. The sick man caught sight of her while I was within two feet of him, and the effect of her appearance upon him was as inexplicable as it was sudden. His shaking fingers dropped the now empty glass with a crash upon the deck, and I distinctly heard him murmur—

“My God! It's Ella.”

The recognition, if such it was to prove, did not appear to be mutual. Mrs. Brinkworth's attention was of course attracted by the falling glass, and she looked at the occupant of the lounge, but beyond a slight flush and a fleeting expression of disgust, which might very naturally have been called up by Orlebar's repulsive, drink-sodden features, no sign of knowing him escaped her. She passed on, stately and unmoved,

to the after-part of the deck, where I had no doubt that Aline was waiting for her.

I had seen too many chance meetings on shipboard for the incident to make any impression on me, and I should have dismissed it altogether from my mind if one of the parties to it had not been so intimately connected with Aline. As it was, I merely noted it mentally for future inquiry, in the event of anything tending to show that Orlebar's presence on the ship would cause annoyance to a lady who had already won my dear girl's regard.

After a good sleep I awoke refreshed, and comforted with the reflection that, after all, beyond specifying the nature of her imaginary illness, Zaverthal had really said nothing more than Aline herself to confirm Sir Simon Crawshay's estimate of her health. The doctor had not examined her chest, and his statement was based on nothing more substantial than a second-hand opinion which was probably all moonshine. I dressed, therefore, with every anticipation of a pleasant evening, and after a short visit to the bridge to see that all was right, I went down and mingled with the passengers, eventually making my way to where Aline was sitting with Mrs. Brinkworth.

I have the instinct, common to most people, of knowing a friend from an enemy at first sight, and something told me from that moment that the quiet sad-faced woman was Aline's friend and therefore mine. I think she had already guessed our secret but, if not, she had every opportunity of doing so in

the cheery half-hour we three spent together before the first gong sounded for dinner. We lovers were too confident in the future and in the freedom which Aline's majority would bring her in a few months to affect more reserve than etiquette demanded in public. The shy and sentimental stage of courtship had been got over in the old *Dahlia*, and there was a very frank understanding between us.

When I sat down presently to preside, for the first time, in the saloon, I found that I had General Waldo for my left-hand neighbour, and on the other side an ancient dowager—Lady Carberry—who took the place of honour by right of her title. Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth were seated at my table, but some way down, and too far off for sustained conversation with them. Parallel with mine was another table, at the head of which Doctor Zavertal presided, with the little Earl of Darranmore and the latter's tutor on one hand, and a financial magnate and his wife on the other. Mr. Desmond Orlebar was also placed at the doctor's table, but some half-dozen seats away. The "Captain's table" of course accommodated those who were or considered themselves the *élite* of the ship, and it was not till I found myself at the head of the brilliant assemblage, and the most deferred-to personage in it, that I appreciated Nathan's compliment in selecting me for the job.

Dinner proceeded gaily, and I worked hard to make up for lost time in cultivating friendly relations with the passengers. General Waldo kept our end of the

table in a constant roar of laughter with comic descriptions of Western life, at which even the starchy old lady on my right had to unbend, and by the time dessert was reached I concluded that the social part of my duty was easier than I had expected. Things were going equally smoothly at the other table, where, with his quips and cranks, the young Earl was evidently establishing himself a general favourite. The interest in the merry youngster even spread to our table, his boyish laughter at Zavertal's good-humoured sallies causing many heads to be turned to look at him. General Waldo, who could see him as he sat, seemed to watch him unceasingly with the sympathetic attention due to a kindred spirit.

Suddenly, as the ladies were beginning to leave the saloon, Waldo plucked me by the sleeve and exclaimed—

“Thunder, Captain! The swell of the ocean ought to be kinder to the swell *on* the ocean. What's up with our young aristocrat yonder?”

I thought at first that the veteran was merely cracking one of his copious wheezes, but I looked round to the head of the other table, and sure enough there was the Earl of Darranmore leaning back in his chair and gone deathly white, while Zavertal had risen and was deftly unbuttoning the boy's collar with one hand and feeling his pulse with the other. The night was dead calm, and, save for the slight tremor caused by the pulsing of the

engines, the ship was as steady as a church. Waldo's suggestion of sea-sickness seemed, therefore, wide of the mark, and I recollected what the doctor had said of the lad's weak heart in the morning.

At Zavertal's bidding a couple of assistant-stewards lifted the young earl's limp form and bore it away to his state-room, the doctor himself following, but pausing as he passed out to say to me—

"It is only a faint. He will be all right to-morrow, but I fear this confirms the report I had of him—poor little chap." And Zavertal hurried away, tapping his broad waistcoat in the region of the heart, and repeating again—"Poor little chap."

The tables were already pretty well thinned, and in a couple of minutes the incident was forgotten by such as remained, Waldo resuming the thread of a yarn, in which he had been interrupted, about a Texan horse-thief, scoring all his points, bringing the story to a close, and thoroughly enjoying the applause that greeted the climax. For a moment or two he sat as though meditating a fresh narrative, then suddenly jumped up and exclaimed—

"Pineapple, by Jove! I guess I'm a whale on pineapple," and before I could tell him that the steward should bring him some he had crossed over to the now vacant table where Lord Darranmore had been sitting, and had seized a dish of the fruit that was there, coming back with it to his own place.



As he resumed his seat he looked at me, for the fraction of a second all the babbling fun in his face changed to stern scrutiny, and in that brief steadfast gaze remembrance came to me of some one quite different whom I had seen before—of Kennard, the American visitor to Nathan's office, who had forfeited his passage. The likeness was one of expression only, and was gone like a flash, as with one of his jokes Waldo set to upon the pineapple with a relish that justified his eagerness to secure it.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE STOWAWAY.*

THE next morning every one was glad to hear that Zavertal's prediction had been verified, and that Lord Darranmore was not much the worse for his faint at the dinner-table. It got to be generally known throughout the ship that the boy's heart was affected; and when he came on deck during the morning, looking pale and seedy, he became the victim of a universal sympathy which didn't best please him.

"It's all rot," was his indignant reply when I met him and remarked that he would have to "go easy" and take care of himself. "There's nothing the matter with me—at least, I never had anything the matter before. I expect I had too much of that meringue cream."

The weather continued fine and sunny, with just enough breeze to revive the jaded among the passengers without making them uncomfortable. Being now clear of the Channel, my presence on the bridge was seldom required, and I contrived to have several delightful chats with Aline, Mrs. Brinkworth discreetly making opportunities for a portion of them

to be *tête-à-tête*. At the same time I did not allow my love affair to obscure my duties to the other passengers, and I worked hard to add to the general yacht-like life on board. All sorts of amusements in the musical and theatrical line were being projected, the doctor showing untiring energy in discovering amateur talent where it might least have been expected. He even laid an embargo on General Waldo to give a character recitation from Rip Van Winkle at a variety entertainment that he was planning for the succeeding night. The Yankee veteran was discussing Zavertal's enterprise in a constitutional we took together before tiffin.

"Wonderful pushing fellow this doctor of yours, Captain," he said, as we paced the deck. "You and he are just cut out for running a marine hydropathic show like this. He's an old partner of yours, I reckon."

"On the contrary, I've only known him a week," I replied. "This is my first voyage in the *Queen*, you must remember."

"Ah, but friend Zavertal hasn't always been at this game, I opine," returned Waldo, with an impatient gesture and one of his quizzical glances. "You can bet he qualified in a wider school than this. I guessed you might have pulled together previously."

"No, General," I said, wondering a little at his persistence after my first denial. "The doctor and I are quite new acquaintances, though I must say that I hope we shall one day be old ones. He is a

pleasant companion to sail with, and about the best man for the berth of ship's-surgeon I ever came across."

"A responsible position—that of ship's doctor," remarked Waldo, more thoughtfully than as yet I had heard him speak. "It entails the power of life and death—the perfectly unchecked power of life and death."

On the top of this conversation I was rather amused when Zavertal on the same afternoon took an opportunity of mentioning Waldo to me from much the same point of view.

"Fine specimen of the globe-trotting American, that neighbour of yours at the saloon table," he said. "You and he seem to hit it off together uncommonly well, sir."

"Oh, he is all right—up to date," I replied. "Perhaps one might get bored in time with his everlasting yarns of Western life."

"I thought you might have met him before—you seemed so friendly," Zavertal said, in the careless tone of one who really wants to know.

"No, I never saw the General before on sea or land," I said. "He is not the sort of man one would forget either. He has a peculiarity. He strikes me as being a little more 'twangy' than most Americans of his class nowadays."

"You are right," replied the doctor, "and it is bound to be genuine. That is about the only thing an American wouldn't exaggerate purposely."

I had got pretty intimate with Zavertal during the four or five days we spent together before the ship sailed. I had told him of the American, Kennard, who had called at Nathan's office while I was waiting to be engaged, and I had since discussed with him his strange forfeiture of his passage, Zavertal remarking playfully that perhaps the gentleman with the pistol had met him again and had not been so forbearing. I was now on the point of mentioning casually how for half a second on the previous night Waldo's expression had reminded me of the absent passenger, but some one hailed me from the bridge and the subject dropped.

A little later on the afternoon of that third day out Zavertal proposed a game of "hide-and-seek," and was soon surrounded by a number of younger passengers eager to join. Several of them hid in turn, and were found in more or less probable hiding-places—under the companion-stairs, behind the piano in the music-room, while one adventurous maiden gave a longer chase than usual by stowing herself in the flag-locker behind the aft wheel-house. Then it was Lord Darranmore's turn to hide, and the searchers all retired to the dome over the saloon-stairs while he concealed himself.

Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth, in common with a number of other non-players, were sitting under the awning, watching the game when it chanced on to the upper deck, and chatting to myself and to General Waldo, who by this time was on speaking

terms with every living soul on the ship. Thus we four were together when Lord Darranmore came out of the deck-house to hide. The best places on the upper deck having already been exhausted by other players, the ladies expressed the opinion that he would have to go below if he was to show good sport.

"With due submission, I guess not," remarked Waldo. "The young'un has got a best bower to play, to judge by his manœuvres."

It seemed to me that the general was right. The boy did not hesitate for an instant, as if doubtful where to go, but turned and went forward on the port side till he came nearly abreast of the doctor's cabin, opposite which our steam-launch was slung. The davits supporting it were turned inwards over the deck to prevent any risk of losing the launch in heavy weather, so that it was accessible without danger of falling overboard. It was covered with a tarpaulin, and to reach it it would be necessary to swarm up the davit, but these difficulties were evidently not going to deter an agile Eton boy from availing himself of a hiding-place so likely to be overlooked. Zavertal was standing in the door of the companion-way ready to give the word to the searchers, and he smiled and winked at us as the young Earl began to shin up the davit hand-over-hand.

Darranmore soon got a grip on the bulwarks of the launch, and we watched him raise the edge of

the tarpaulin, duck his head beneath it, and slowly wriggle out of sight. As soon as he had disappeared Zaverata gave the word to the seekers, and they came trooping out of the companion-way to commence the search. The quest had hardly begun in earnest when Lord Darranmore's head reappeared from under the tarpaulin, and it was seen that his face wore a comic expression of alarm or excitement.

"I say, this game's off," he cried, clambering out of the launch. "There's a chap hiding in there already."

"Nonsense," said Zaverata, going up to him as he reached the deck. "You must be mistaken, Lord Darranmore. There can't be any one there."

"I tell you I'm not mistaken," retorted the lad hotly. "There's a man lying huddled up in the bows. I heard him breathing first, and then I put my hand out and felt him."

"We'll soon settle it," I said, joining the group with Waldo and a number of other passengers. "Here, Smith," I added to a quartermaster who was passing, "just take a look under that tarpaulin, and see if you can catch a stowaway."

But before the order could be executed the boy's statement was verified in a different way. The tarpaulin over the bows of the launch was raised, and a head covered with tousled black hair appeared, presenting such a woebegone figure of fun that some of the passengers laughed. The apparition looked like a foreigner, and certainly did not belong

to the ship. As for myself, I felt considerable annoyance, for a stowaway was a pest against which I had taken no precautions, it not occurring to me that any one would try to sneak a passage on a ship not known as a regular "liner."

"Come down out of that," I said. "We will see if we can't find you better quarters in the hold with a brace of anklets to steady you."

But the threat fell flat. "No spik ingeese. Angry," moaned the stowaway.

"Poor fellow, he means that he is hungry. Don't be hard on him," pleaded Aline, who had come up with the rest, and to that sweet intervention the stranger owed the treatment that was meted out to him. By signs he was at length induced to leave the launch, and on reaching the deck he stood revealed as a tall, finely-built fellow with features that, despite their extreme swarthiness, were by no means ill-looking. Zavertal, who was a master of many languages, tried him with several, and at last pronounced him to be a Spaniard and a ship's steward by calling, who, failing to find a berth on a ship going to Spain, had taken this way of getting home.

"Very well," I said; "we will allow him to work his way, but he shall not get off too easy. He must go the round trip with us, and we will leave him at Gibraltar or Lisbon on the homeward voyage. Off with him forward and give him some food."

My verdict having been translated to him, he was



taken in charge by the quartermaster, bowing and scraping his thanks. The excitement lasted the passengers the rest of the afternoon, Lord Darranmore creating much amusement by taking all the credit of the capture. I heard Waldo drawing him on the subject of his discovery.

"I guess you were never smart enough to think of the launch to hide in yourself?" said the General.

"Well, not quite," admitted the boy, reluctantly.

"And who might have been responsible for that bright idea?" asked the old gentleman.

"It was the doctor who put me up to it," said Darranmore.

Waldo did not pursue the matter further, but walked away with a queer shrug of his shoulders.

That night at dinner the swarthy Spaniard, washed and brushed up, took his place among the assistant stewards who waited at Zavertal's table.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FIRST DEATH.

THE run across the Bay of Biscay was accomplished in fine weather, and on the morning of the fifth day out, when the passengers came on deck Gibraltar was in sight right ahead. By the time breakfast was over we had threaded our way through the coal-hulks, and the *Queen of Night* lay at anchor a quarter of a mile from the New Mole. In a twinkling she was surrounded by the usual medley of shore-boats, manned by the jabbering hucksters of water-melons and grapes. Away on the Rock the bugles were sounding merrily for morning parade, and even from our anchorage the great grey mass, with the straggling town at foot, was seen to be as gay as a geranium bed with the blaze of British scarlet.

My instructions from the owners were to allow a clear twenty-four hours at this port, to enable the passengers to go ashore and explore it thoroughly. Numerous parties had already been formed for the purpose, and our boats were soon busily engaged in transporting sightseers to the landing-place. Among the first to start was a boat-load personally conducted

by Zavertal, comprising Lord Darranmore and his tutor, Mr. Orlebar being also with the party. The latter had been drinking heavily ever since he came on board, and I heard the doctor trying to induce him to remain quietly on the ship under the pretext that the excitement of a day's outing would be injurious to him. But this representation only had the effect of increasing his determination to go, and Zavertal yielded—somewhat too readily, I thought.

Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth had arranged to join a party which was going under the escort of General Waldo, and at the last moment, finding that there was nothing to keep me on board, I decided to accompany them. On landing we strolled through the main gate and up the steep street to the post-office for letters and telegrams. On entering the building we were met by the doctor's party just leaving after making a similar call. His convoy were mostly busy with their correspondence, but Zavertal himself crammed a cablegram he was reading into his pocket, and came up to me, looking worried and anxious.

"That infernal fellow, Orlebar, has given us the slip," he said. "Perhaps I ought to have been more careful; but as he gets all he wants on the ship I didn't think that he would seize upon the chance of a shore racket. I expect he's soaking himself in some wine-shop by this time."

"I shouldn't trouble about it," I replied. "The man is a free agent, and so long as he doesn't make

himself personally offensive to others we can't very well control him."

But, as it turned out, the contingency I mentioned was just what we had to reckon with. Zavertal's party and mine separated again, his to go through the galleries and mount to the flagstaff; while we preferred to loiter away the day in the Spanish shops and among the quaint byways of the old town. We lunched at the hotel, and later on we were sitting in the public gardens, having what Waldo called "a high old time," when that worthy veteran, who was next me, touched me on the arm and whispered—

"Here comes the black sheep. Look out for squalls, Captain; he appears to be on a thundering out-West tear."

Following the direction of his eyes, I saw Orlebar coming toward us, and his demeanour certainly warranted the General's warning. His bloodshot eyes glared with drunken ferocity, and his wild gesticulations as he made straight for us were already causing alarm to the half-dozen ladies of our party. Mrs. Brinkworth especially, who was sitting on the other side of the General, went as white as a sheet, and I remembered the recognition of her by Orlebar which I had noticed on the first day out.

It was quickly shown that Aline's companion was indeed the cause and object of the dipsomaniac's singular demonstration. Pushing up to her, he commenced a flood of incoherent abuse, from which before Waldo and I laid hands on him, it was only

possible to gather that he meant to imply that she was his divorced wife. Realising that the wretched creature was not master of his actions, we handled him gently, and, taking an arm each, led him to the garden gates. There I gave him to understand that he would be handed over to the police if he returned to annoy the ladies, further adding that his baggage and his manservant would be sent ashore the moment I got back to the ship, as it was impossible that I could risk a repetition of his outrageous conduct by permitting him to continue the voyage. I was worked up into a fine white heat, and did not stop to consider whether the owners would approve a course which would entail their refunding the price of his ticket.

Orlebar went cursing away toward the town, and Waldo and I walked back to the others. We had collared the drunken man so promptly that we had had no time to note how the victim of his diatribes received them, and it was reassuring to find that, though still very pale, Mrs. Brinkworth was quite composed. Aline, with generous vigour, had taken up the cudgels on her companion's behalf, and was explaining to the other ladies that, far from Orlebar having divorced his wife, she had in truth divorced him for gross cruelty and misconduct.

"Ella has shown me copies of the *Times* containing the report of the trial," the fair young champion was saying as we resumed our seats. "She has nothing to be ashamed of or to conceal."

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had let it be known that my late husband was on board," said the injured woman, sadly, "but I was aware that he had married again, and I thought that he would have been the first to want to keep our former relations secret."

"And so he would, I guess, if he could have controlled himself," said Waldo. "It is the condition he is in that we have to thank for to-day's outbreak. I can't think what our usually astute doctor is up to, leaving him on the rampage about the town."

The ladies of the party, as indeed all throughout the ship, were already prejudiced against Orlebar, and Aline's advocacy effectually nipped in the bud any tendency they might have had to look askance at Ella Brinkworth because of the unpleasant occurrence. In fact they treated her with the greatest sympathy, and when the poor thing began to explain that the name she was known by was really her maiden name, they begged her not to distress herself by referring further to the matter.

We had arranged to return to the ship for dinner, and the scene in the public gardens having rather damped our ardour, I do not think that any one was sorry when it was time to go down to the boats. In taking a short cut to the landing-place I piloted the party through one of the narrow streets in the lower town where every other house was a sailors' drinking den, either under the pretentious title of wine-shop or as an avowed cabaret, and we had nearly reached

the end of the not very reputable thoroughfare, when a man hurrying out of an open doorway almost ran against me. His apologies were cut short at the very commencement by mutual recognition. It was Doctor Zavertal, and I had a pretty good inkling of what he was up to.

"Pray don't think that I am on the spree, ladies," he laughed, in response to the looks of astonishment cast at him. "I must hope to be able to clear myself later, but—just a word with you, Captain," and he drew me aside, while the others, in obedience to my gesture, went slowly on towards the landing-place.

"You are looking for Orlebar?" I said.

"Yes," he replied. "I fully expected to find him at Saccone's, but he must have got among the less respectable boozing-kens. I am sure to unearth him somewhere hereaway, though."

"I shouldn't waste time on him," I replied; and then I briefly recounted what had happened, concluding with my determination to send Orlebar's luggage ashore, together with his valet, and to leave the lot behind. Zavertal listened with every appearance of genuine annoyance to the story of the wretched man's behaviour, but the moment I mentioned the course I was going to take I felt that he disapproved of it, though his face expressed nothing more than respectful concern.

"You have quite made up your mind that this will be best, Captain Forrester?" he said, and I fancied that his eyes hardened as he spoke.

"Certainly," I replied. "We can't have a drunken blackguard on board insulting people with reckless lies. What other 'best,' as you call it, can there be?"

He looked at me thoughtfully before answering—not as if in any doubt as to his purpose, but rather with a cold, measuring glance that strove to fathom the lengths to which he could safely go with me. So at least it seemed to me, and the prying scrutiny galled me into impatience.

"Come," I said, looking significantly up the street to the corner round which Aline and the rest had now disappeared, "have you any objection, Doctor Zavertal?"

He came a step nearer and spoke so straight that once again a budding suspicion, ridiculous in its vagueness and born of what then looked like merest trifles, faded into the background.

"As you ask me the direct question, sir," he said, "it is my duty to say that I have the very gravest objection to leaving Mr. Orlebar behind. He has been entrusted to me by—his relatives, as a patient in serious danger of his life. How can I reconcile myself to leaving him stranded here, where he will probably do himself to death in a week? What shall I say to his people on my return—and what of my professional reputation? I do not see how you can expect me to endorse your decision, and I trust sincerely that you will reconsider it. And surely, sir, the credit of the ship as a safe resort for invalids should weigh with you."



From his point of view I quite saw the force of his argument. His appeal, too, was couched so strongly and yet so modestly, that almost before I knew it I was debating whether I could yield to his wishes without loss of dignity. I remembered Nathan's instruction to defer to him in all matters affecting the passengers, and I was the more ready to do so as he had made no attempt to avail himself of an authority which he doubtless knew he possessed. Moreover, if I held out and he cabled home to the owners for confirmation of his wishes, I should look a good deal more foolish than if I gave in now, in the very probable event of their backing him up.

"We appear to be both working to the same end, Doctor—the welfare of the passengers," I said. "Supposing that I cancel the arrangement to oblige you, can you give me any sort of assurance that the man shall not repeat his conduct?"

"You shall have my personal guarantee that nothing of the sort shall happen again," was the reply. "I cannot engage to cure the fellow, either of his disease or of his propensities, but you shall have my entire co-operation in putting any restraint upon him that may be necessary. I don't care so long as I have him on the ship for treatment, and between you and me, sir, I think that death will relieve us of his presence before long."

"So let it be then," I said; and, leaving him to continue the search, I hurried down to the boat, to find the others embarked, and waiting for me in some

curiosity as to the cause of my delay. I said nothing, however, during the pull out to the boat, out of consideration for Mrs. Brinkworth, but confided the change of plan to Waldo as soon as we were on board and the ladies had gone to their cabins. To my satisfaction he abstained from chaffing me on my being overruled by the doctor, and he even assented that "second thoughts were often best."

Orlebar was brought on board by Zavertal while dinner was on in the saloon, and, being taken straight to his state-room to bed, he gave rise to no further uneasiness that night. We weighed anchor the next morning at ten o'clock, and shortly afterwards he appeared on deck, to the surprise of everybody seeming better rather than worse for the escapade of the previous day. He had his lounge placed in its usual position under the lee of the smoking-room; but, instead of perpetually sending to the bar for "pegs" according to his habit, he amused himself quietly with a novel. Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth naturally gave him a wide berth, but he gave no sign of noticing his former wife's presence on deck.

There was a good deal of shipping about in the Straits, and, in consequence, for several hours after leaving the Rock I remained upon the bridge, whence I had a clear view of all that went on below. Eight bells had just announced noon, when I saw Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth gather up their books and work and go down the saloon stairs. A few moments later Doctor Zavertal, who had been paying great atten-

tion to Orlebar all the morning, came out of the surgery, and, going aft, felt his patient's pulse, carefully timing the result with his chronometer. He came away immediately, his face very grave, and then he too disappeared down the saloon stairs, after stopping on the way to answer some remark which General Waldo, whom he met, made in passing. After parting from the doctor, Waldo went on and chatted for a moment or two with Orlebar—some-what to my surprise, considering the man's conduct on the day previous—and then joined a group of passengers further aft.

At the end of five minutes Enriquez, the stow-away, now serving as an assistant steward, came on deck with a tray on which was a glass of dark liquid that looked like port wine. He took it to Orlebar, who drank it at a gulp and replaced the glass on the tray. Enriquez then started to return below, but as he was nearing the companion-way he tripped and fell, dropping the tray on to the deck with such violence that the empty glass was smashed into half a dozen pieces. Regaining his feet in an instant, he collected the bits of broken glass and tossed them overboard, after which he proceeded on his way and disappeared down the stairs.

During the next few minutes I was occupied with the navigation of the vessel, and paid no attention to what was happening on deck. When I again turned my eyes that way I saw that there was a commotion in the neighbourhood of Orlebar's lounge. Zavertal

was pushing his way through a number of male passengers who had gathered round it, while the ladies were all looking that way with frightened faces.

A minute later a messenger came to me from the doctor to say that Mr. Orlebar was dead.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *A MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATION.*

THE stir caused by Desmond Orlebar's death soon quieted down, hardly lasting, in fact, longer than the end of luncheon, which was luckily announced shortly after the occurrence. Zavertal saw to all the necessary arrangements for the funeral, which he advised, for excellent reasons, should take place the same afternoon; and as he professed himself able to certify the death as due to natural causes, it was not for me to put obstacles in the way. I myself conducted the short ceremony with which the body was committed to the sea from the fo'c'sle—well away from the passengers, very few of whom knew what was going on forward.

Orlebar's habits had made him so unpopular on board, that the only sentiments which I heard expressed about his decease were of the "serve-him-right" order. All the sympathy evoked was reserved for the unfortunate woman, who, by a strange coincidence, had found herself brought face to face with the miserable creature whom she might reasonably have expected to have gone out of her life for

ever. Mrs. Brinkworth kept to her state-room for the rest of the day, but Aline, who was constant in her kindness, told me that she did not pretend to feel regret for a man who had ceased to be anything to her but a shameful memory.

A musical entertainment had been arranged for in the saloon that evening, and, true to the policy which our philosophic bo'sun had suggested, the event of the morning was regarded by Zavertal as a reason for holding rather than postponing it. Finding that he was backed in his opinion by a great majority of passengers, I offered no objection, though to me, who had never sailed in a pleasure-cruiser before, it seemed a little callous. However, as the affair was to come off, I thought it would be foolish to excite controversy by absenting myself, and I confess that, apart from the absence of Aline, who was sitting with Mrs. Brinkworth in her cabin, I passed a very festive evening.

After the improvised curtain had fallen on the last "turn," I spent an hour or two on the bridge. When at length I went to my room to turn in, the passengers had all retired for the night, and, save for the throbbing of the engines, the ship was as quiet as a church. The electric arc in my cabin had been switched off as usual the last thing by my steward, and such light as there was came from an oil lamp which I kept burning all night in case I was suddenly called. My table stood almost beyond the reach of the lamp's feeble rays, and, therefore, it

was not till I had partially undressed that I noticed a sealed letter lying on the top of my blotting-pad. The envelope itself was enough to pique curiosity, being addressed to me in large printed capitals, that suggested a desire for disguise. Tearing it open, this is what I read, written in the same obviously unnatural hand :—

“ To Captain Forrester.

“ DEAR SIR,—I am not one who believes in anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances. It is because I believe that the circumstances in which I write are very exceptional that I adopt a mode of communication that I ordinarily despise. I the more readily do so, since in a few days I may have the pleasure of confiding in you personally.

“ At present my object is to warn you against the man Enriquez who was found hidden on board on the third day of the voyage. I can give no reasons for my warning as yet, but in all sincerity I say that in my belief you will have serious cause for regret if you disregard it. If a certain theory which has been forced upon me turns out to be correct, this man's presence on board may mean the difference between life and death to some of those entrusted to your charge. The next port of call in the programme of trio is Genoa. I would suggest that *en route* you should suddenly make some excuse for running into Barcelona, and there put Enriquez ashore without

first giving him any hint of your intention. In order to secure the full advantage of my proposal it is also imperative that you preserve absolute silence with regard to this letter and its subject, trusting in no one, however worthy to be consulted on such a matter any one may appear. One of my reasons for not speaking to you in person about it is the necessity—the vital necessity—of my interference being kept secret from certain persons on the ship, and that end would be defeated if we were seen putting our heads together. There are sharp eyes and ears on the *Queen of Night*.

“In conclusion, you will see that if I am wrong in my theory—hunting a mare’s nest, in fact—no harm will have been done by landing a stowaway in the country to which he professed to be anxious to go. If his account of himself is true he will be the first to thank you. On the other hand, if my conjectures are correct, you will have at least thrown obstacles in the way of cruel and designing men.”

There was a nice production for a tired ship-captain to receive at the close of a rather worrying day! It ended abruptly, without signature of any kind, the usual vulgar *noms de guerre* of anonymous letter-writers, such as “A Friend” or “A Well-wisher,” being despised by my correspondent. This fact, in conjunction with the earnest tone of the language, which was at least that of a person of education, weighed with me in his favour, and made me dis-



posed to credit the writer with genuine motives. At any rate the letter did not emanate from a jealous or quarrelsome fellow-servant of the man attacked.

We should not be off Barcelona till late on the following night, so I decided to sleep on the matter before coming to a conclusion how to act. Our course, which in any case lay close to the northern Spanish port, would not have to be altered till the last moment in the event of my wishing to run in, and there would therefore be no need for any one to know that we were going to touch there till after every one but the watch on deck had retired to rest. As to the letter itself, I recognised from the first that it would be useless to puzzle over its origin. It was too carefully disguised to admit of the handwriting being traced, and it was not likely that the person who placed it on my table would have entered my room while any one was looking. All I had to do was to decide whether or no to heed the warning.

In the morning, as often happens when one goes to bed with some knotty question in doubt, I awoke with a settled mind. I would adopt the mysterious writer's suggestion, and land Enriquez at Barcelona, and the argument that prevailed was the principal, nay, the only one in the letter—that if there was nothing wrong about the man he would be the last to complain. Any how, it would be better than running risks, and as we were not steaming on time the delay of an hour or so would harm no one.

All that day we steered north-eastwards under the coast of Spain, running in near enough to give the passengers a view of the ruined Moorish castles and nestling villages among the vine-clad slopes. Fine weather still prevailed, and Aline and her companion emerged from their brief retirement, Mrs. Brinkworth being evidently grateful for the universal kindness that ignored her connection with Orlebar. In looking over my private log of the voyage I find that two items pertinent to the story are entered under that day's date, though at the time they seemed of such slight importance that it is only by chance that I recorded them. One was that General Waldo was confined to his state-room with an attack of gout, and would see no one but his bedroom-steward—not even the doctor, who of course proffered his services.

The other item was that the young Earl of Darranmore, while skylarking as usual on deck after breakfast, had another fainting-fit very like the first, except that it lasted longer and left him much more prostrate. Zavertal was most assiduous in his attentions to the lad, and brought him round in time to take his place at the dinner-table.

At eleven o'clock that night, when the ladies had all gone to their cabins and only a few men lingered in the smoking-room, I calculated that we were about twenty miles south of Barcelona, steering so as to pass that port at a distance of three miles. In order to run for the harbour the course would have

to be altered in half an hour, and I went up on to the bridge to be ready for the emergency. It was Mr. McIntyre, the chief officer's watch, and I felt pretty sure that that imperturbable Scotchman would execute any orders I might give him, without troubling himself about reasons.

It was as I expected. After a turn or two on the bridge I said quite quietly, and with the air of having forgotten something that didn't much matter—

"By the way, Mr. McIntyre, keep her off a point or two nor-west, please, and bare up for Barcelona harbour. I want to send a boat ashore with a telegram."

"Aye, aye, sir," was the unconcerned reply, and he gave the requisite order to the man at the wheel without comment. To keep his mind from dwelling too much on the sudden order, I broached the subject of some painting that had to be done before reaching Genoa, and conversation on the bridge of a large steamer approaching a crowded port being necessarily disjointed, the topic lasted us till the ship was in the bay and within half a mile of the town.

Not wishing to disturb the passengers and waste time by dropping anchor, I gave orders to lay to and have a boat manned, intimating that I would go in her myself. Not till she was reported ready did I descend from the bridge, and it was only at the last moment, as I reached the head of the ladder, that I paused, as though struck with an after-thought, and

told the man who was minding the side to go and turn out Enriquez, the stowaway.

"I'll take him along—as an interpreter," I said.

Waiting at the ladder-head, I was glad to see that the unexpected stoppage of the engines had caused no alarm. The ship from stem to stern was wrapped in the stillness of night, and except for a few figures—those of the watch—dimly seen forward, the long expanse of deck was deserted. In my own room the lamp was burning, but the windows of all the other deck-houses were dark, including that of Zavertal, who was sometimes a late sitter.

In less than two minutes I saw my messenger returning alone. "The Spaniard is not in his bunk, sir, or anywhere else in the steward's quarters," he said. "The others know nothing of him, except that he turned in at the usual time and ought to be in bed."

Under the circumstances this was not only startling, but embarrassing, for I had run into Barcelona for no other reason than to put the stowaway ashore, and there was the boat ready and waiting below. In addition, the fellow's absence from his bed in the middle of the night seemed to lend colour to the vague imputation that he was up to no good on board. I was rapidly debating what was best to be done, when my messenger exclaimed—

"Beg pardon, sir, but there is the man, sir, coming out of the surgery."

It was true enough. Enriquez was leaving Zaver-tal's cabin. On seeing us he made a motion as though to slink back again, but, changing his mind, he came boldly along the deck, I suppose on his way back to his bunk.

"Hi ! you there. What are you doing on deck at this time of night ?" I asked.

He stooped, with a cringing bow, and began to rub his stomach. "Seeck—me very seeck, Senor Capitan. Go doctor," he whined.

"Very well," I said, "we'll see whether your native air won't cure you. Get down into that boat. I want an interpreter."

I forgot for the moment his limited stock of English, but the gesture with which I accompanied the command made it sufficiently clear, and he evidently understood. Yet there was a certain hesitation in his manner of obeying. He went slowly to the ship's side, casting furtive glances along the deck, and once half turning as if to expostulate or refuse. However, I kept close behind him, letting him see that he had got to go, and he went. Following him down the ladder, I took the tiller, and the boat was soon speeding across the smooth water of the harbour. I had prepared an envelope containing a blank sheet of paper, and as soon as we reached the landing-steps I gave it and an English sovereign to Enriquez, who had sat silently scowling in the bows. My idea was that if I was doing the man an injustice the money would be useful in taking him to his own

place, while in the meanwhile it would help to sustain the fiction I meant to employ.

"Go telegraph office. Send quickly. Then come back here," I said, choosing words that would be most readily intelligible to a foreigner. If he had suspicions on the ship I think my manner must have allayed them now, for he put out his hand for the envelope and the sovereign, and went up the steps on to the quay. The moment he had disappeared I gave the word to row back to the steamer.

"It's all right, my lads," I said, in answer to the honest wonder expressed on the faces of the men as they bent their backs to the oars. "The stowaway is going to get left, that's all. We don't want that kind of cattle on the ship."

"He don't take kindly to it, Captain," replied one of the men. "Whew, look out! He's going to shoot!"

We were half a dozen boats' lengths from the quay, and, glancing back, I saw the dark form of Enriquez outlined at the top of the landing-step. There was a flickering gas-lamp behind him which showed up the glint of a pistol that he held levelled at the boat. Even as we looked, every second expecting the crash of a bullet in our midst, he thought better of it and lowered the weapon, to hurl after me instead a cry of angry menace.

"Next time, Forrester—next time," he shouted. "This is the worst night's work you ever did for yourself."

All around was calm and still, and his words rang sharp across the water. They were spoken in excellent English, and in a voice I could have sworn I had heard before—where, I racked my brains all the way back to the steamer to remember.

## CHAPTER X.

### *A DETECTIVE'S HOLIDAY.*

WHEN the boat reached the steamer's side day was breaking, and I was not sorry to see Zavertal leaning over the rail watching our approach. I had missed the point at the time, but it had since struck me as curious that there should have been no light in the doctor's cabin if the stowaway's story of having gone there for medical relief were true. The needful remedies could hardly have been found and dispensed in the dark, and I had begun to fear that the man's "seeckness" was only an excuse covering some sinister design of which perhaps Zavertal himself was the victim. While striving in vain to recall where I had previously heard the stowaway's familiar voice, I had reproached myself for not ascertaining whether the doctor was all right before I left the ship, and the sight of him there, peering down at us through the gloom, was a relief.

As soon as I had mounted to the deck he advanced to meet me with a look of undisguised inquiry, and I noticed that in the grey dawnlight his face looked singularly puckered and old.



"There is nothing wrong, sir, I hope—to cause this deviation from our programme?" he said, rather stiffly for him.

"Oh, dear no," I replied; "I merely ran into Barcelona to send a private telegram. I thought it a good opportunity, too, to get rid of the stowaway." Having found Zaverthal safe and sound, the thought flashed across me that as he was not a victim of Enriquez he might be a partner with him in something underhand, and that in any case it would be more discreet to say nothing for the present of having seen the man leave the surgery, or of his sudden proficiency in English. I watched the doctor narrowly for any sign of satisfaction or the reverse at the news, but he yielded none—did not even evince any interest.

"That was just as well, I dare say," was his careless reply, and then he went on to say—

"I am rather glad you have touched here, for it will give me an opportunity of procuring some drugs of which I have run short. I suppose you have no objection to my taking a boat and going ashore for an hour. I will not keep you longer."

Heaven knows I am not over sharp, but I was sharp enough to see that if there was anything in my theory that there might be some mysterious bond of union between Zaverthal and the stowaway, this might only be a try-on to effect a meeting, and I promptly refused the request.

"It is quite out of the question," I said; "we sail

"at once," and to prevent further argument I sang out to the officer on the bridge to get under weigh. The engine-room bell rang in response to his signal, and I had already begun to mount the bridge-ladder to personally con the ship out of harbour before Zavertal grasped that there was no appeal from my decision. Then he sprang forward and took steps up the ladder after me, his face quivering as he hissed in a tone I had never heard him use before.

"You are not doing well by yourself, Captain Forrester. You have exceeded your instructions to defer to me in matters of this kind. It is you who will suffer."

"Go to your cabin, sir, and behave yourself, or I will land you at Genoa," I said sternly. "You seem to forget that I command this ship."

He slunk away, scowling, and I went to my duty feeling that I had rather scored than otherwise by provoking this exhibition of temper on his part. The intense irritation into which my refusal had betrayed him suggested that there was some stronger motive for his wishing to go ashore than the replenishment of his medicine-chest, and if there was a secret motive I was glad to have thwarted him. At the same time a feeling of uneasiness that there was some mystery on the ship with which I could not cope because I was ignorant of its nature, grew upon me, and I longed for my unknown correspondent to reveal himself. The indications that his advice had not been altogether uncalled-for im-

planted in me a reliance in his judgment, and I should have liked to have further availed myself of it.

I wondered, too, as I set the steamer's head N.E. by E. out of the bay, whether there was now to be an open breach between Zavertal and myself, and what effect a quarrel between us would have on the harmony of the voyage. I had been conscious for several days of an increasing suspicion that there was another side to the doctor's character besides the one that he presented to the public, and though I didn't care twopence about his relations with myself, I hoped he would not show temper to the annoyance of the passengers.

So far as this was concerned my apprehensions were soon set at rest. When we were clear of the headlands I turned in for a couple of hours, and while I was dressing for breakfast my steward brought me a few lines from the doctor, begging forgiveness for his "unwarrantable outbreak." He could only account for it, he wrote, by his not having been able to sleep, and he sincerely trusted it "would make no difference to the kindness I had extended to him since I had commanded the *Queen of Night*." On the surface this made matters smooth, and I sent him a verbal message that I should think no more of the incident—a polite fiction, I am afraid, seeing that all the morning I continued in grave doubt whether the deference and joviality which he lavished upon myself and upon the passengers respectively were really genuine.

General Waldo's place at the saloon breakfast-table was still vacant, and inquiries from his bedroom steward elicited the fact that his gout, though better, did not permit of his leaving his cabin. The absence of the snowy-haired, apple-cheeked veteran, with his merry jests and yarns, was the subject of universal regret, and at the request of a passenger with whom I was walking the deck I put my head into the surgery and asked Zavertal if he had seen the old gentleman.

"Yes," was the unexpected reply. "I saw him half an hour ago, but not professionally. He wanted me to witness his signature to a will he has been amusing himself with making. I don't think from his appearance that he is seriously ill, but he declined to describe his symptoms to me—on the grounds that he never consults medical men."

"He is a queer old fish," I remarked, and I was turning to resume my promenade with the passenger when Zavertal called after me—

"By the way, the General will send for you, sir, I expect, to be the second witness. He was saying something about a will witnessed by a captain and a doctor being unassailable."

Sure enough, I had not taken two turns on deck when a steward came up to say that General Waldo would be greatly obliged if I would step down to his state-room on a matter of private business. Apologising to my fellow-promenader, I went down to the main-deck at once, anticipating nothing but amuse-

ment from the interview. And certainly on my entrance into the state-room, the occupant's rueful countenance, framed in a huge red nightcap, contemplating a swathed foot with an expression of malignant hatred, formed a typical picture of the "gouty subject" calculated to provoke a smile. But at that point amusement ended for me, once for all, for the rest of the cruise, and if I laughed during the next fortnight, God knows it must have been forced laughter. All was to be blind mistrust and dark groping; while, beyond, the shadow of a more definite terror was in store for me.

The moment I was inside the cabin, and Waldo saw that I was alone, his face changed and he motioned to me to close the door. "Lock it," he added, in a voice so new to him and yet so strangely familiar to me that I knew he must have been acting. Feeling that I stood on the brink of a disclosure, I obeyed mechanically and then turned to him again.

"Sit down on the bed, Captain Forrester," he said—the pronounced American accent was no longer noticeable. "Never mind my foot: it is as well as your own. We must not remain too long together, so let me be brief. It was I who wrote that letter on which you so wisely acted."

I could only mutter something incoherent. I should have been surprised at learning that the anonymous letter emanated from Waldo as I had known him, but a greater surprise had gripped me

—at the marvellous change in the man's manner. So far it was in manner only.

"Yes," he went on, "and I will give you a very good reason for that warning directly, but first let me set you at your ease. I can see that you are struggling with a sort of half-remembrance of our last meeting. There, perhaps that will assist you."

As he spoke his hands went quickly to his head, and in a twinkling he had whipped off the red nightcap and the snowy mop of hair, showing *the close-cropped, iron-grey poll of Kennard, the missing passenger whom I had met in Nathan's office.* By a second adroit movement he detached the bushy eyebrows and relaxed some tension of feature that completed a disguise so simple that only the proof I had received made me believe in its efficacy.

"I remember you very well," I said; "but what is the——"

"The meaning of this masquerade?" he caught me up. "That is what you are here to learn. And in case of interruption, I must prepare you by saying that the will you were to witness is as bogus as my gout—invented for the sole purpose of throwing dust in the very wide-open eyes of Doctor Zavertal. I wanted to talk to you alone, and I thought he would be less likely to suspect the real nature of our conversation if I furnished him with a spurious sample of it first. Do you happen to know if he took the bait?"

"I begin to think that Zavertal is a difficult man

to read, but he gave me the impression of having believed you," I said. "He spoke rather contemptuously of the service you had asked of him, and he said that you intended to ask the same of me."

"Good!" exclaimed Kennard, as I must now call him. "Now as to that letter, I have not the slightest notion who Enriquez is; but I warned you against him because I believe that he came on board stow-away-fashion with Zavertal's knowledge and connivance, and Zavertal is without exception the most murderous villain as yet unhanged on God's earth. I am a detective, pretty well known on the other side of the Atlantic, and, for the matter of that, on this too, in certain circles, so that I do not speak without authority. I had him in my hands once and he slipped through my fingers, or rather through one of the meshes in our sieve-like criminal code. The details of the case—I might say combination of cases—are immaterial here, but the man is one of the most expert professional poisoners who ever trafficked in human lives."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Then why not denounce him and hand him over to the authorities at the next port?"

"So I should if I could find anything fresh against him; but old scores have been wiped off by the verdict of the American jury, and I should only burn my fingers by bringing vague charges," replied Kennard. "I have noticed one or two suspicious circumstances during the voyage, and I may catch

him tripping yet before it is over. I have the pull over him in this—that he does not suspect my identity, though he was a little uneasy about me on the first day, as I think you saw.”

“Yes,” I said. “But what was the reason for this disguise, if, as you told me in Nathan’s office, you are really on a holiday?”

Kennard smiled—not Waldo’s senile grin, but his own sharp twinkle. “Haven’t you heard,” he said, “that when an actor gets a night off he generally spends it at the theatre? Well, in the same way, when I chanced upon Zavertal on the stairs of Nathan & Co.’s office I——”

“It was him, then, whom you met on the way out?” I interrupted. “I did not know he was about there.”

“He was most certainly there, and drew a pistol on me under the impression that I was shadowing him,” proceeded Kennard. “After that meeting I made a few inquiries, and found that he was medical officer on the very steamer in which I was contemplating a trip. Then it struck me that it would be interesting to combine business with pleasure and see how Zavertal was behaving—whether he was really on the square, or working on the old lines. I saw that if I was to make discoveries it would be useless to appear on board *in propria persona*, and so I booked as the doddering old idiot who is regarded as a sort of ship’s-fool. But thinking that you would probably have mentioned my intention of going the



voyage to Nathan, if not to Zavertal himself, I took the precaution of booking a second passage in my name, and then of forfeiting it."

"Your ruse has entirely misled him," I said. "But, strangely enough, yours was not the only forfeited passage," and I told him of the Mr. Vizard, whom I had first seen in Zavertal's company on the day of my engagement, and of the latter's introduction of him to me as a perfect stranger on the occasion of my first visit to view the ship. I took the opportunity, too, in a shame-faced sort of way, of mentioning the sensation I had experienced in Nathan's office of having been watched by a pair of eyes of which, as soon as I saw them, Zavertal's instantly reminded me. Kennard did not laugh, as I had half feared, but, though he scanned my face seriously, passed on to say—

"Vizard's acquaintance with Zavertal can be considered later. At any rate, his name is not known to me in connection with the old affair. At present I am concerned with what has come under my own eyes, and made me thoughtful, if not exactly suspicious, since we left London. Item number one happened at dinner on the second day out, when young Barranmore was taken ill at table. You saw me get up and go over to where they had been sitting, after the boy's removal, under pretence of fetching a dish of pine apple? Well, that action was prompted by the sight of a piece of paper lying close to Zavertal's plate. What do you make of it?"

He handed me a strip of paper on which was printed the one word—

“DIG.”

“Look at the back,” he added, with a smile at my blank stare of incomprehension.

“It seems to be a label,” I said, after turning it over and perceiving that the back was gummed.

“If, as I think, it is a druggist’s label,” replied Kennard, “the letters ‘Dig’ would be an abbreviation for ‘Digitalis,’ the name of a drug that specially affects the action of the heart, and which, given in sufficient quantities, is a deadly poison. Considering Zavertal’s past record, the find led me to wonder whether Lord Darranmore’s fainting-fit had an artificial origin.”

“But the boy didn’t die, and the doctor worked hard on both occasions to bring him round. That wasn’t the act of a poisoner,” I remarked.

“My dear Captain Forrester, I envy you your guilelessness,” returned Kennard. “Supposing Zavertal had anything to gain by doing away with the lad, he would prepare the ground first by inducing a few fainting-fits just to allay suspicion when he administered a fatal dose. See: he has reaped the advantage already. He has furnished you with an argument in his defence.”

I was obliged to admit his superior ‘cuteness.’ “And where does the stowaway come in?” I asked.

“Ah, there you have me—at present,” was the reply. “I ascertained, however, that in that game

of hide-and-seek Darranmore went and unearthed him from the launch on Zavertal's initiative, which looks very much as if the finding of the stowaway was an accident done on purpose. But it was a more definite circumstance that prompted me to write you that letter, and then lay up here so that there should be no suspicion of collusion between us."

"And that circumstance was?" I asked.

"That the stowaway brought Desmond Orlebar his last drink, and then, by smashing the glass, destroyed all traces of its composition," replied Kennard, gravely.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE OVERLAND ARRIVAL.*

"You place upon me a very heavy responsibility as captain of this vessel," I said, after a long pause. "Do I understand you to bring a charge of murder against Zavertal and Enriquez?"

"By no means; I have not adequate evidence to substantiate one," replied Kennard. "I am only putting you on your guard, so that there may be another pair of eyes besides my own to watch unceasingly. Don't disregard trifles. Why, on that day at Gibraltar I spotted Zavertal leading up to Orlebar's burst by persuading him to the contrary—a sure move with a man of the drunkard's temperament. I am positive that Zavertal intended him to slip the rest of the party."

"Preparing the ground again—by letting him drink himself ill," I hazarded.

"Precisely; but if so, it was nearly overdone that time," replied Kennard. "The wretched fellow was so bad that he swore off, and by noon next day was a lot better. He told me so himself ten minutes before he died, though Zavertal described him to

me as *in extremis*—a significant discrepancy. By the way, did you have any trouble with Enriquez?"

I told him of the man's reappearance at the top of the landing-steps, of the pointed revolver, of the suddenly acquired English, and of the strangely familiar sound of the voice in which the stowaway threatened me.

"All tends the same way, you see—to danger ahead from those two," said Kennard. "And so you cannot remember where you heard the voice before?"

"No; I can't place him."

"Well, I'll try and place him for you," proceeded Kennard, readjusting his disguise. "I won't risk making a wrong shot yet, but—first tell me when we are due to leave Genoa?"

"We arrive there at noon to-morrow, barring accidents, and leave the same time the following day," I replied.

"Then I think that within forty-eight hours I shall be able to tell you where you met the stowaway before. And now you have been here long enough. I am going to 'recover' this afternoon, so we shall meet at the dinner-table; but at other times it will be well for us to be seen together as little as possible. I shall be at work in my own way, and you shall be posted in all fresh developments."

On leaving Kennard's cabin I went straight to my own room, and shut myself in to review the position as calmly as I could. The more I looked at it, the more I was convinced that there was absolutely

nothing to be done. The American detective himself had said that there was no evidence—only suspicion—and a nice fool I should make of myself if I openly accused Zavertal of being in a wholesale attempt to poison passengers. Again, I could not safely suspend him on the grounds of his being a known bad character. Even by Kennard's showing, he had been acquitted of the charge that had been brought, and he had been trusted by the owners long before they had heard of me. Further, Kennard was just as much a stranger to me, and for all I knew quite as likely to be a scoundrel with some ulterior object of his own in view as was Zavertal. It was true I was prepossessed in the American's favour, while I had come to distrust the doctor ; but against this there was the set-off of the former being a disguised man travelling under an *alias*—hardly a recommendation for implicit confidence.

And yet it was a horrible strain to think that Kennard's story of the past and fears for the future might *not* be baseless, and that we might have a murderer in our midst with a roving commission to destroy life. Kennard had only mentioned suspicions in two cases, and it was strange that these were two out of the three which Zavertal had indicated as serious on the first day out. I started in terror at the thought that the third was Aline herself, and it flashed upon me that Zavertal might have named these three cases in order to pave the way for the fatal termination he meant to secure. And yet

where was the motive—what could be the inducement—for his turning his hand against three utterly unconnected strangers who could never have injured him?

The problem was beyond me, but I found temporary comfort in one thing—that for forty-eight hours at least there would be no fear of mischief. Granting that there was real danger, Zavertal would not dare to strike a fatal blow till he was able to avail himself of sea-burial, and that would not be till after we should have sailed from Nice two days hence. In the meanwhile I decided not to depend too much on Kennard, but to keep a good look-out all round on my own account, and if anything occurred which, in my judgment as captain of the ship, called for instructions from the owners, I could cable Nathan from Genoa.

But during the ensuing twenty-four hours nothing happened to mar the serenity of the voyage as the *Queen of Night* cut through the blue waters that wash the southern shores of France. Past rock-girt Monaco, under the brow of Cap Martin, within sight of the orange groves of the Riviera we steamed merrily, no sign of the black care that filled the heart of the captain finding place amid the racket of festivity that prevailed on board. Kennard, in his resumed character of General Waldo, gave no fresh warning, and the doctor pervaded the ship with his genial forethought for the comfort of all. As for sickness, there was none on board,

Lord Darranmore having quite recovered from his last fit ; and, in short, as I whispered to Kennard next morning, there was no peg to hang a rag of suspicion on.

"Wait," he said quietly, and turned away.

We were steaming steadily for the Molo Vecchio as he spoke, Genoa the "Superb" being well in sight ahead, rising tier above tier on its amphitheatre of hills from the bustling, thriving streets of the port in front to the stately groups of palaces beyond. The passengers were all on deck, forming parties and making plans to visit the picture galleries and palaces of the ancient city ; but on this occasion I meant to remain on board, influenced, I am not ashamed to say, by the fact that Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth had expressed their intention of not going ashore. They had not yet sufficiently forgotten the unpleasant incident at Gibraltar to be anxious for more sight-seeing, they said.

We came to an anchor half an hour after noon, and the shore parties lost no time in leaving the ship. Neither Kennard nor Zavertal had confided their plans to me, though I expected that the latter would be certain to attach himself to one of the parties in his usual capacity of showman and master of the ceremonies. When luncheon was served in the nearly deserted saloon, it was therefore a surprise to see him seated at the head of his table, supported only by a clergyman and a couple of old maids who disliked getting in and out of boats. At



my own table only Aline and her companion took their places; though half-way through the meal another surprise was forthcoming in the entrance of "General Waldo," who explained that a twinge of gout had warned him at the last moment to stay on board.

"Quite right, General," Zavertal called across from the other table; "I, too, am taking a rest to-day. We will have a game of chess together after tiffin, if you like."

But, though Kennard assented in his feigned voice and pronounced drawl, the game was not destined to come off between them—at least not over a chess-board. A minute or two later a steward brought Zavertal a letter, and informed him that it had been brought by a boat from the shore. After hurriedly reading it the doctor came over to us and said: "I must go ashore after all, I find. I have just heard from an old student-friend of mine that he is staying in Genoa for a few days, and he wants me to spend an hour or two with him at the Hotel de Genes. Our game of chess must be postponed, I am afraid, General."

There was a trace of suppressed excitement in his tone, and he turned and left the saloon at once. Kennard exchanged a meaning glance with me, but finished a yarn with which he was amusing Aline without making any reference to the doctor's altered arrangements. When we all adjourned to the upper deck I clearly made out Zavertal a quarter of a mile

away in a shore boat that was being rapidly pulled to the nearest landing-steps. Turning to call "Waldo's" attention to the fact, I found that the detective had disappeared.

Ten minutes afterwards I was passing forward to speak to the chief engineer, when I was accosted by a shabby, foreign-looking man, who might have been an Italian opera-tout or vendor of curios. I had given strict orders for none of these gentry to be allowed on board, and was on the point of letting the stranger have "a bit of the skipper's tongue," when he checked me with a whispered injunction to "keep calm."

"Kennard," I stammered.

"Yes," he said. "I am off to shadow our friend the doctor. There's something in the wind. He was waiting for that letter. Expect me back when you see me—in the character of Waldo, of course. I am taking the needful make-up along," touching a black handbag he carried. "When he returns I sha'n't be far behind him. Don't relax your vigilance, Captain, because the enemy is absent. He may be represented, for all we know."

He was over the side and into a shore boat before I could reply, and to tell the truth I was nearly as glad to be rid of him as of the doctor, with his disguises and mystery-making. After settling matters with the engineer, I went aft and spent the happiest time of the whole voyage, sitting with Aline under the awning all the sunny afternoon while Mrs. Brink-

worth played propriety. This was a duty in which that good lady, having been now taken into fullest confidence, performed very leniently, and my girl and I were accorded plenty of opportunity for discussing our future in the good time of freedom which a few months would bring. Aline was particularly anxious to extract a promise from me to give up the sea after our marriage, but though she worked hard to secure it, she failed to shake my determination not to be dependent on my wife's bounty. I was in the midst of an argument on the loss of self-respect that would arise from such a position when the first boat laden with returning sight-seers came alongside.

Two minutes later the voice of some one who had approached us silently startled me into a sense of present realities.

"Good-evening, Captain Forrester," the newcomer was saying. "Better late than never, you see. I missed you before, but rather than lose the trip altogether I have hurried on overland to join you here."

It was Vizard, the passenger who had failed to put in an appearance when we left London, who was standing before us. His tall, commanding figure was set off by a well-cut tourist suit, and he carried an expensive travelling-rug over his arm. His swarthy, handsome face looked courteously down at us, and he raised his hat in recognition of Aline's presence.

But for all that I was certain that there was no mistake. I recognised his voice at once. It was the

voice which had been puzzling me for the last three days—the voice in which Enriquez the stowaway had threatened me from the landing-steps of the harbour of Barcelona.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *ENTRAPPED.*

As, to Vizard's identity with the stowaway there was no doubt in my mind at all. His height and build were similar, and allowing for the difference caused by the bushy black hair and whiskers which "Enriquez" had worn, the features I now saw were the same. In the wisdom that comes after the event I wondered that I had not recognised him before, but it was the voice that did it.

With difficulty I forced myself to give him a civil answer, having no wish in Aline's presence to demand the explanation I meant to have from him, and luckily he relieved me from the need for further caution by almost immediately going below to see the chief steward about his berth.

One thing was very certain—whether there was anything in Kennard's graver charges or no, the *Queen of Night* was too full of petty mystery for my liking, and I made up my mind there and then to have an end of it. My discovery of Vizard's peculiar conduct in coming aboard as a stowaway after booking a passage would furnish me with a quite legiti-

## ENTRAPPED.

mate excuse for raising the question of his relations with Zavertal, and after the rumpus that was sure to ensue I hoped that the air would be cleared all round by a disclosure of anything that was not on the square.

Being detained over some trifle I was a little late for dinner that night, and when I entered the saloon the company was already seated. Here and there at the tables there were a few gaps, owing to several of the passengers preferring to dine on shore, and I was somewhat disturbed to see that both Zavertal's and "General Waldo's" chairs were empty. In view of my approaching interview with Vizard I was particularly anxious to see and consult Kennard, the more so as the verification of his prophecy that I should hear more of the stowaway within forty-eight hours seemed to indicate that he understood far better than I what was going on. Though he had no knowledge of Vizard, he must have foreseen that the stowaway would come round from Barcelona to Genoa by rail and make another attempt to board the ship.

Without in any degree shaking my conviction as to his identity, one fact with regard to Vizard filled me with a sense of the difficulty of the task before me. He seemed to be well known to at least a dozen of the passengers, and from the remarks made by some of those near me I gathered that he was an enormously wealthy man and quite a personage in London society. This made no difference to my intention to have it out with him after dinner ;

he had pointed a pistol at my boat's crew, and he had threatened me personally—eccentricities which, so long as I commanded the ship, I did not mean to go unpunished, no matter how powerful the perpetrator—but I foresaw that his popularity and position might place serious obstacles in the way of getting rid of him. If he denied having come aboard as a stowaway, people would be more likely to believe him than me; while if he admitted it lightly, as having been done as a practical joke, I would probably be expected to pass it over. And that was just what I would rather chuck up the command than do.

During dinner I watched Vizard closely as he chatted easily with a London banker and his wife, next whom he had procured a seat on the ground of previous acquaintance. He gave me the impression of having an iron will, and his face in repose, I thought, would be a cruel one, but as it always appeared to be covered with a stereotyped "society" smile I had no chance of fathoming its capacity of expression. I was glad that he sat at the other table and that I was not called upon to converse with him, for once or twice I caught him eyeing me in a way that was almost a challenge. Indeed, it seemed as if he were actually courting recognition, so obviously did he seek to meet my gaze.

As soon as the saloon was cleared, instead of joining the passengers on deck I went straight to my room, and, ringing up my own steward, sent him to

## ENTRAPPED.

ascertain whether either Doctor Zavertal or "General Waldo," or both, had returned to the ship. In each case the answer was in the negative. Without a moment's hesitation, for the man's covertly defiant bearing in the saloon had put my back up, I despatched the steward to Vizard with "Captain Forrester's compliments, and he would be glad if he would come to the captain's room." Then I sat down and waited, full of righteous indignation, and determined to command my own ship.

In less than two minutes there was a tap at the door, and Vizard stepped into the cabin. His smile had vanished, leaving his face very hard and stern; but though he looked alertly expectant, he showed no traces of the surprise which a passenger suddenly summoned to the captain's cabin in such a high-handed way would naturally have felt if ignorant of the cause. This strengthened me in the accusation I was going to make, and I spoke with confidence.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Vizard," I said, "because I recognised you the moment you came on board this evening. What do you mean by shipping as a stow-away, and then, when I land you as such, by threatening my crew and myself with a revolver?"

"It is always open to a man to place his own constructions on the actions of another," was the reply, spoken sneeringly, which almost took my breath away. It was tantamount to an admission, and his manner had nothing of the practical joker about it. I felt



that whatever his motive had been, whatever his schemes were, that they had been conceived and carried out in grim earnest.

"And the constructions that I put upon your conduct, sir, are such that I decline to take you as a passenger," I replied hotly. "The steward shall render you every assistance, but a boat will be ready to take you and your baggage ashore in fifteen minutes."

The notice to quit was received with a sarcastic bow.

"It has not dawned upon you, my worthy captain, that the constructions which your owners may put upon your conduct, in forcibly landing a passenger whom they have contracted to carry, may cause them to dispense with your services?" he said.

"Damn the owners!" I retorted, and I remembered afterwards the curious smile with which he heard the expletive. "If you can settle it that way with them, do so by all means. I wouldn't sail under owners who would back up a masquerading mountebank of a stowaway—no matter what his position—against their captain. Come, sir, you had best go and see about your things. The boat will be manned and ready on the port side in ten minutes."

"Very well, I will go," he replied, drawing himself up to his full height and turning to the door, but pausing on the threshold to say: "You alleged just now that I threatened you at Barcelona. Do you recollect the words of my threat?"

I wanted no more truck with him, so merely nodded.

"Then, speaking entirely without prejudice, you can consider those words as still in force and as exactly defining the position," he said as he left the cabin.

Ten minutes later I had the satisfaction of seeing him into the boat, which I took care was not manned by any of the crew who had put him ashore at Barcelona. The third mate went in charge, and I gave him a hint that he had a tough customer to deal with and had better slip a pistol into his pocket. I was curious to see if Vizard would make any protest or explanation before the passengers, but, so far as I know, he held no communication with any one from the time of leaving the captain's room to that of going over the side. As the boat shot out into the darkness towards the twinkling lights of the city, he waved his hand jauntily to me and I heard him laugh.

In half an hour the boat returned, and the third officer reported that Vizard had given him no trouble whatever. He had not alluded to the circumstances under which he was being put ashore, but had chatted civilly on trifles, and had finished up by giving the boat's crew a sovereign to drink his health. On the part of such a man this complacency struck me as ominous. Naples was our next port of call, and I determined to keep a good look-out for him there.

For the moment, however, I was rid of the unde-

sirable passenger, and I was free to turn my attention to a matter of more immediate interest. This was the non-return of Zavertal, who, when I turned in at eleven o'clock, was still absent from the ship. Kennard, also, was still on shore, but from what he had said, I regarded this as merely a consequence of the doctor's absence, and in any case, as a passenger, he was entitled to a freedom of action which was hardly the privilege of an officer paid to discharge medical duties. To my mind, the doctor's conduct in spending the night on shore without leave constituted, to say the least of it, a breach of discipline, though whether, in the peculiar organisation sanctioned by the owners, he would consider it so was doubtful.

In the morning he was still absent, and at ten o'clock I had heard nothing of him or of his "shadow," though they were both aware that the ship was to proceed on her voyage at noon. Another half-hour passed, and I was thinking of sending on shore to the Hotel de Genes, which Zavertal had mentioned as the place of meeting with his friend, when a shore boat came alongside, bringing a letter addressed to me in his handwriting. Tearing it open, I read as follows :—

"British Consulate, Genoa,

"June 24, 1893.

"DEAR CAPTAIN FORRESTER,

"I am detained here in an extremely awk-

ward dilemma, from which your presence can alone extricate me.

"May I beg of you, on receipt of this, to come ashore at once to the Consulate, where you will find me anxiously awaiting you. The affair will not take long to settle, and there is no reason why the sailing of the ship should be delayed if you act at once.

"Yours respectfully,

"LUCIUS ZAVERTAL."

There was only one thing to be done, and that was to go and get him out of pawn whatever his trouble might be, or, failing that, to secure the services of another medical officer. For a pleasure-cruiser, with between two and three hundred people on board, many of them considering themselves invalids, to put to sea without a doctor would be an impossibility. The boat that had brought the letter was still alongside, and I decided to go in her in preference to waiting while my gig was manned. After informing the chief officer of the contents of Zavertal's letter, I put a sum of money in my pocket in case of need, and went towards the boat. On my way along the deck I met Aline and told her that I was going to fetch the doctor, who had been detained by business on shore.

"I wish you would leave him behind then, Cyril," she said. "I cannot bear that man."

"Why—what has he been doing?" I asked, in

some surprise, for I had noticed that Zavertal had been particularly civil and deferential to her and Mrs. Brinkworth.

"Oh, nothing very much; only he is always pestering me to take his medicines when I am perfectly well and don't require them," she replied.

This piece of information was so new, and, moreover, fitted in so compactly with the horrid thought that had crossed my mind as to Zavertal's possible reasons for mentioning the three "serious cases," that it occupied me all the way to the landing-place. Taken in conjunction with the doctor's strange detention at the Consulate, the only conclusion I could deduce from it was that Kennard had made some important discovery which had warranted his applying to the authorities, but how Zavertal could suppose that I should be either able or willing to liberate him under such circumstances was beyond my understanding.

The two nimble Italian boatmen made short work of the distance, and I was soon walking across the Piazza Cavour to the Consulate. From my early studies of detective literature, I had half expected to see Kennard hanging about the door in his disguise, but he was nowhere visible. Only the usual streams of ships' captains, seamen, and merchants' clerks jostled each other going and coming through the swing-doors leading into the waiting-room of the busiest Consulate in Europe. On my entrance, I wrote my name and business, so far as it was

describable, on a slip, and gave it to an attendant who vanished with it into another room, to return almost immediately with the welcome news that the Consul would see me at once. A moment later I was ushered into the presence of her Majesty's representative.

My first impulse on entering was to look round for Zavertal, but a glance showed that there was no one in the private room besides the Consul himself, seated at his desk, and a clerk writing at a side table. Curbing my surprise, I pulled myself together in time to return the official's salutation.

"You have called, Captain Forrester, in consequence of a communication from your medical officer, I think," the Consul said, and I remembered afterwards the look of keen inquiry with which he eyed me.

"Yes; I understood that Doctor Zavertal was here," I replied.

"So he is; you will see him presently," returned the Consul. "There is a matter about which I want to question you first. A gentleman named Vizard has been here to lodge a complaint against you, Captain, for refusing to carry him on your steamer, although he has paid his fare. He says you accuse him of having been a stowaway from London to Barcelona—or something of the kind."

"And so he was, sir," I replied. "Why, he as good as admitted it last night. There is no doubt he is the same man whom I landed. If Doctor

Zavertal is here, he should be able to corroborate me."

"Doctor Zavertal has already seen Mr. Vizard," said the Consul, curtly. "One more question. Have you any accusation or charge to make against the doctor?"

From the Consul's tone and manner I guessed that Zavertal had taken sides against me, by pretending to fail in recognising Vizard as Enriquez. I began to have an uneasy feeling that something had been got up for me, and this so raised my gorge that I answered rashly.

"Not exactly an accusation—at least, not yet," I blurted out. "But I believe him to be a scheming, underhand scoundrel. I cannot put it in words, but I only know that the ship has been chock full of mysteries and disguises and conspiracies ever since she left port, and they can all be traced to this man."

"Ah, that about settles it then," said the Consul, decisively. "If you will step in there, Captain, you will find that I have arrived at a practical solution of the difficulties that are worrying you."

He pointed to a baize-covered door at the opposite end of the room from that at which I had entered, and in my anxiety for a speedy settlement of the Vizard affair I made for it in all haste, my impression being that it would lead to an inner apartment where I should perhaps find the other parties to the controversy in which I was now apparently involved. Directly I opened the door I saw, by a wall four

feet in front of me, that I was mistaken. The place in which I found myself was a narrow passage, passing the door in each direction to the right and left. Before I could note more, a number of faces closed in upon me on either hand, I was violently seized by strong arms, a pungent cloth was pressed to my nostrils, and I felt myself becoming quickly powerless in mind and body.

But as my senses left me, the last definite objects presented to my fading sight were the features of Vizard and Zavertal standing out distinct and triumphant among the crowd of olive-skinned, unknown faces that hemmed me in on every side. Then I struggled hard, but my limbs refused to answer to my will, my ears buzzed and roared like the engines of a tramp steamer, darkness and silence swooped down upon me, and I knew no more.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE CONVENT OF SANTA LUCIA.*

WHEN I came back to consciousness I was lying on my back on a dirty bed in a stone cell some twelve feet long by six across, and my returning senses took shape slowly in the process of counting the bars in an iron-grated window high up in the opposite wall. How long I had lain there I had no means of knowing. A stray sunbeam flickering through the dusty glass of the window told me that it was daytime, and that was all. As recollection grew upon me, I moved my limbs to see if I was bound, and I rejoiced in a dim and misty sort of way to find that, within the narrow compass of my prison at least, I was free.

But that was the extent of my self-gratulation. When I remembered the scene at the Consulate, and the manner of my forcible capture, I gnashed my teeth with impotent fury to think that Zavertal and Vizard, about whose co-operation there could no longer be any doubt, had bested me with such ease. Whatever their objects might be, they had evidently seen that I was hostile and suspicious, and they had got me deposed from the command

by some ruse by which the Consul had been made the unconscious abettor of their villany. By this time the *Queen of Night* had probably proceeded on her voyage in charge of another captain, and the thought maddened me that Aline was on board, ignorant or misinformed of what had befallen me, and with those two unscrupulous villains at hand free to carry out whatever devilry was in their minds.

These considerations quite outweighed the disgust I felt at the treatment to which I had been subjected; but after a while I began to wonder what colourable pretext my enemies could have offered to the Consul to induce him to sanction their conduct. Of course I never doubted that he had been duped, but a terribly strong case must have been presented to him, I thought, for him to permit violence to be used against a British subject within the walls of the Consulate. With what crime was I charged? Again, however heinous that crime might be, why that extraordinary method of arrest? I had no previous experience of Italian justice, but I could not believe that it was usual to chloroform prisoners in order to make them "go quietly."

My mind having cleared sufficiently to reason thus, the impulse prompted me to try and ascertain whether I was really in prison or no. The place of my confinement certainly warranted no other supposition. The walls and floor were of stone, the door massive and nail-studded, and the window was placed so high that its lattice of iron bars could only have been

intended to prevent escape—not accident. Having no means of filing the bars, flight by that route was out of the question, but I thought that by standing on the bed and making an upward spring, it was just possible that I might reach the inner sill of the window, and hang on long enough to obtain a view of the outside surroundings.

At the second attempt I was successful. My fingers got a grip on the stone sill, and by dint of pulling up my own weight, I managed to raise my head sufficiently high to look out. I saw an old and tangled garden surrounded by stone walls, and with nothing more human-like in it than here and there a broken statue peeping through the matted undergrowth. The paths and terraces were moss-grown and uncared for. Beyond the far boundary wall the ground sloped upwards, and I could see that it was quite country, and only sparsely studded with large houses at considerable intervals.

Having noted that my window was about twenty feet from the ground, I dropped back into my cell, the wiser only by the negative theory that my place of confinement was not a prison. The neglected condition of the garden precluded the idea that the place was a Government establishment of any kind, and the situation tended to prove that it was not the jail. I judged from the country beyond the walls that I was somewhere on the rising foot-hills at the back of the city, whereas the jail was in the central and thickly built over district of the Via Garibaldi.

Further reflection was cut short by the sound of approaching footsteps, followed by the clanking of bolts and chains. A moment later the door opened, admitting three stalwart Italians whose appearance at once put an end to any lingering notion that I might be in a legal prison. If I had been held captive by brigands in a mountain fastness, I could not have had guardians who more thoroughly looked the part than the greasy, ragged, garlic-smelling rascals who crowded into the narrow cell. They all carried oak cudgels, which, judging from the ferocious glance they shot at me, they would use with very little provocation. Separately, I could have easily tackled any one of them, but the number put all ideas of attacking them out of my head at once—especially as I did not know how many of the same sample might be within beck and call.

One fellow carried a bowl of stew, and another a stone jar half-filled with country wine. These they deposited on the floor, one of them saying, with a gesture : “Deener—Signor eat deener.”

This denoted a modified knowledge of English, and I at once broke into a torrent of protest and inquiry—where was I? why had I been so treated? was I free to go away?

At the last question the spokesman laughed, and answered the first question as though it comprised a reply to the others.

“This is the Convent—the Convent of Santa Lucia,” he said.

This conveyed nothing, and when I pressed him further he refused to say why I had been brought there, and in whose keeping I was. The only piece of information he vouchsafed increased my anxiety and dismay: On my demanding to be taken instantly to the British Consul the man replied insolently—

“Consul come here see Signor in one week. No use making fuss before.”

“Is there any one named Zavertal, or Vizard, in this cursed place?” I asked.

But he only shook his head vacantly, and again pointing to the wretched food withdrew with his companions, barring the door behind them. I was too excited to be hungry, but recognising the necessity of preserving my strength I ate some of the mess and drank all the wine, after which I sat down on the bed—not to despair, but to think out some way of escape. That my capture was in some degree sanctioned by authority I concluded from the man’s statement that the Consul would visit me in a week. That was so far reassuring, as showing that I was not in the hands of professed criminals, but it also spurred me to endeavour to free myself, seeing that the only person who could help me would not be accessible for seven long weary days. To remain shut up for that time, in doubt as to what those two scheming villains were up to, and with that ever-haunting fear about Aline hanging over me, was not what I meant to endure.

I had sat there brooding for an hour or more,

when again I heard the tramp of approaching footsteps. On the door being opened, two people—both strangers to me—came in, while outside were clustered the three men whom I had seen before. The two who entered were quite of a different stamp, and my heart bounded when I saw that the hindermost was dressed in the garb of an English clergyman. The first-comer was a big lank-haired Italian, elderly and of pompous manners, but he had the air of being a person of education, and in authority. He seemed to search my face with a keen scrutiny, and then, falling back a pace or two, he said a few words in Italian as he motioned his companion forward.

The clergyman was spare and ascetic-looking, and he proceeded to address me in an irritating, unctuous voice. "I am the new English chaplain here," he said. "Need I say with what heartiness I shall place my ministrations and advice at your disposal. I have called to see you in the exercise of my duty at the special request of the Consul."

"You are very kind," I replied—in, I fear, a thank-you-for-nothing tone, "but I should prefer to see the Consul himself. The only service any one can render me at present is to tell me why I am detained in this hole, and to get me out of it as quickly as possible."

The clergyman sighed a professional sigh. "Those are matters quite beyond my province; I am afraid," he whined, in the nauseous hypocritical twang that was fast making me hate him. "Any spiritual consolation now? or the loan of a nice book to read?"

In either of those ways I shall be so privileged to administer to your wants."

In the doorway the pompous authoritative person, evidently ignorant of English, was having our conversation mutilated to him by the greasy tatterdemalion who had a smattering. The man's whispering, therefore, overlapped the last sentence by twenty seconds, and under cover of this the parson, catching my eye, added quickly, whispering himself with great earnestness—

"I am here to help you. Appear angry and drive me away, but take the book I shall offer you."

With difficulty controlling my delight sufficiently to seize the cue, I cursed him so vigorously for an unsympathetic humbug, unwilling to aid a fellow-countryman in distress, that the translator threw up his hands in despair. The effect upon the clergyman was even more marked. Uttering feeble protests, he retreated to the door, where he nearly fell into the arms of the Italians, who rallied to his assistance. But checking the onslaught they seemed about to make upon me, he ventured back a little way into the cell and laid upon the bed a book which he had been carrying under his arm. This being safely accomplished, he beat a second retreat, pulling the door after him, and then I heard the bolts shot and the footsteps of my visitors departing.

The moment the sounds died away I sprang up and clutched the book, which was rather a bulky volume, bound in cloth with red edges. Directly my

fingers closed upon it I knew that it was no book, but a dummy forming a box of which one of the covers was the lid. Wrenching it open I could hardly repress a cry of exultation, for neatly coiled in the interior was a silken cord, slight but strong enough to bear the weight of a man's body, a file, a small chisel, and a half sheet of notepaper on which were scrawled the following welcome lines :—

*"Zavertal has been too clever for us, but I shall beat him yet. In case you do not know, you are in the Convent of Santa Lucia, which is used as a private madhouse. I bring you means of escape. Make the attempt to-night an hour after sunset. I shall wait for you at the right-hand angle of the fair garden wall, outside. The ship has sailed, with McIntyre in command, but if you get away to-night we can pick her up at Naples. No time to write more, as I have to devise means of getting to you somehow. Explanations when we meet.*

KENNARD."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MAN AT THE BUFFET.

So the clergyman was none other than our versatile American passenger in a new disguise. I should certainly never have penetrated it, and even now I was not sure whether my late visitor, "the newly-appointed English chaplain," was Kennard himself or an emissary.

Speculation on this head was futile, for the blessed fact remained that I was possessed of the means of escape, and my first act was to conceal the articles about my person, lest they should be unearthed by the wretches whom I could now truly describe as "keepers." In the course of bestowing the things about me, I made the welcome discovery, which in my excitement I had omitted to look for before, that my pocket-book, containing between seventy and eighty pounds in English money, was still in my possession. On the other hand, my knife had been taken away—two facts which spoke at least of a *bona fide* belief in my madness on the part of the proprietor of the asylum.

My watch, which had been left to me, told that

there were still four hours to wait before I could commence operations, and slowly the time dragged indeed. During the interval I had two more visits from the unwashed trio who acted as warders—once to supply me with supper, and lastly to see that all was secure for the night. It was not till after they had left me some time on the second occasion that the sun having now set, I began the attack on the window.

By raising the narrow truckle bed on end, I improvised a ladder which enabled me to work on the bars without having to hang on with one hand, and I then brought the file into play. Every now and then some distant noise in the building would cause me to stop and listen, in fear lest the steady rasping I was obliged to make had attracted attention, but no one came my way, and in an hour and a half from commencing I had an aperture big enough to squeeze through. To make fast the cord and swing myself down was easy work to a sailor, and in a very few minutes I had crossed the tangled garden and reached the angle of the boundary wall without meeting a soul or hearing a sound to denote that my flight was discovered. A hasty examination of the wall proved it to be so rugged with age that there was easy foothold. I was up and over in no time, to find myself standing in a dark, tree-bordered lane, and I had hardly touched ground when a figure emerged from the gloom.

"Is that Forrester?" came in the welcome tones of Kennard's natural voice, but almost whispered.

"Yes, thanks to you, here I am," I replied, scarcely breathing.

"Not a word more till we are beyond range of pursuit," he proceeded; "follow me," and leading the way along the lane, he turned into a field which we crossed till we came to a disused barn. Having drawn me inside and shut the door, Kennard lit a candle, and searching under a pile of straw produced a bundle of clothes.

"There," he said, tossing it to me, "we can talk now without danger of being overheard. In the eye of the Italian law you are an escaped lunatic and liable to recapture, but if you will get into that toggery while I spin my yarn I hope to be able to steer you out of Genoa without trouble. It is not the police we have to fear, but a treacherous hound whom I have a pretty shrewd suspicion is our friend the stowaway."

"You mean Vizard? You have seen him?" I exclaimed.

"So! You have had an opportunity of recognising the stowaway's voice, and it was as I expected?" replied Kennard, eagerly. "In that case," he continued, "you had better take the floor first, and run through the heads of what has happened to you since we met last. But get into those clothes while we talk. There is no time to spare."

It will be remembered that Kennard went ashore to look after Zavertal, and had therefore not been on board the *Queen of Night* when Vizard made his

appearance. So it was at that point that I began, and while transforming myself into a fair semblance of an Italian fisherman I recapitulated the incidents that preceded my visit to the Consulate. Sitting on a truss of straw in the flickering candlelight, Kennard heard me to the last without remark. Then he said—

“Your experience fits in with mine thoroughly, and clears up the only point that was puzzling me—how the Consul was fooled into playing into their hands. You acted a little too much on impulse, my friend. You have to thank your high-handed treatment of Vizard for the rough time you have been having. It would have been better to have played possum and not to have let on that you recognised him, when he so obviously showed that he wanted you to do so. Why, he went on board—I can see plainly—with the express purpose of provoking you into refusing him a passage.”

“How so?” I asked, quite believing him, but still mystified as to motives.

“Simply because your assertion that a wealthy passenger, *who produced evidence that he was in London three days ago*, was a stowaway landed at Barcelona convinced the Consul that the allegation of lunacy which Zavertal was bringing against you was correct. But listen,” proceeded Kennard, “while I detail *my* experience. Zavertal had the start of me for the shore by ten minutes, but by bribing my boatmen I got them to spurt and reduce the distance

between us so materially that I was landed soon enough to keep my man in view.

"He turned into the Via Vittore Emanuele, then sharp to the right up the Via San Lorenzo, and along the Piazza Deferrari to the Hotel de Genes, thus proving that so far as his destination was concerned he had not lied. To speak the truth gratuitously was so unlike the man that I suspected a motive, and sure enough at the hotel entrance I found it. He passed into the hall, but instead of going on to the bureau to make his inquiries he stationed himself just inside the swing-doors and waited, his object evidently being to ascertain if he had been followed by any one from the ship. He must have expected such a person to give himself away by either coming on his heels into the hotel or by looking through the doors after him, but he made a slight error. It is thirty years since I put in my apprenticeship at the elementary art of shadowing, and Doctor Zavertal had no notion that the seedy tout shambling by was hot upon his trail.

"I went on as far as the corner of the Via Carlo Felice, and stood there for five minutes watching the doorway in case it was a dodge to slip away to some other rendezvous. But no sign of the quarry appearing, at the end of that time I walked back sharply past the hotel, and by a twist of my eye saw that he was no longer ambushed in the entrance. Once more I turned, and boldly entered the hall.

"You will probably give me a good deal more

credit than I deserve for my next proceeding ; for, though it may look smart on the surface, it was really only a chance shot, based on information which you yourself gave me: I walked right up to the clerk at the bureau and asked him the number of Mr. Vizard's room."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed ; "how did you arrive at that?"

"I argued it out that, from your showing, Zavertal had a previous acquaintance with Vizard which he wished to conceal, that Vizard's reference to 'the cursed American' and 'taking risks,' which you repeated to me the other day as overheard by you, might have meant my contemplated trip, that he intended to go in the ship in order to help his friend thwart any designs I might have, and that as he had mysteriously thrown up his passage at the last moment he might nevertheless have acted precisely as I did, and have come on board in an assumed character. From that my mind was naturally led to the stowaway, and to the manner in which he was set free from his hiding-place by Zavertal putting young Darranmore up to concealing himself in the launch. I got fairly gripped with the idea that, if I was right, Vizard would come on by rail and catch us up here.

"I was therefore not surprised when the clerk gave away the situation by asking, 'Who are you, and why do you want to know?' I told him, speaking of course in Italian, that I had been employed to

procure some opera tickets by the Signor who had just gone up to Mr. Vizard's room, and that I had been instructed to deliver them there. Luckily, further questioning was stopped by a guest coming to make inquiries of the clerk, and turning to attend the new-comer he promptly got rid of me by naming the number of the room—14, on the first floor.

"I found the room on the main landing close to the head of the staircase, in one of the best positions in the house, but the door was shut, and there were too many people about in the corridors for eaves-dropping in the open. I was so impressed with the necessity of overhearing their conversation if possible that I chanced it, and, ready with an excuse and an apology if wanted, entered the next room—to find it, as I had dared to hope, unoccupied. It was not long, I can assure you, before my ear was glued to the wall separating me from number 14.

"To my disgust the partition was too thick to admit of hearing any sustained conversation, but certain names and disjointed sentences reached me, which by the light of what has happened since, and taken in conjunction with my previously-formed suspicions, greatly tend to confirm the latter.

"The first words I made out were in the voice that I know now to be Vizard's natural tone: 'Consul notoriously obstinate. Once decided, never allow he was wrong.'

"Then, after an interval, Zavertal's voice said: '*Alibi* easily managed. A wire to Nathan would

settle that ;' to which I caught the direct reply : ' Let it be so then ; I will get on board at once.'

"After another break, in which their words were inaudible, Zavertal said : ' Pietro Mascagni of the Saint Lucia Convent is our man. A couple of hundred will ensure a quietus for the meddlesome dolt.'

"Then with further lengthy intervals of indistinct mutterings I caught the following words and phrases :—

"*Zavertal* : ' Darranmore after leaving Naples.'

"*Vizard* : ' All goes well, could rejoin you at Alexandria.'

"*Zavertal* : ' No sign of Kennard.'

"*Vizard* (part of direct reply to the last) : ' —not do to make too sure. He might join the ship at any port of call.'

"And then, Forrester," Kennard proceeded, rising from the straw, and putting his hand kindly on my shoulder, "I caught a sentence—the last I overheard—which I would not repeat to you if I hadn't confidence in your nerve. Of course I have not been so blind as not to notice what every one on the ship noticed—your relations with the belle of the voyage."

"Good God !" I exclaimed, "then the devils *are* scheming against Aline. Yes," I added, "you may safely tell me. I shall not hamper you with hysterics."

"Well, then," said Kennard, "the last broken sentence that reached me was in Zavertal's voice :



'The Challenor affair in the run from Alexandria to Malta.'

"And we are stranded here," I groaned. "Tell me, though—I wonder I have not asked before—how long is it since I was captured?"

"Only this morning," replied Kennard; "and look here, Forrester," he went on, "the time is not come for despair yet. It might be a good deal worse. We know, at any rate, that whatever tricks they mean to play with Lord Darranmore are postponed till after the ship leaves Naples. That must be three days ahead, at least; and long before then, with any luck, we shall be within hail of the *Queen of Night*. And what they politely call 'the Challenor affair' is not to come off till after the ship has visited Alexandria, which allows a wide margin in case of any mis-carriage at Naples.

"But let me finish my story. After the last words that reached me there was a continuous buzz of talk for a quarter of an hour, then the sound of movement, and a minute later I heard the door of number 14 open and some one go towards the staircase. I was at the door of number 13 in time to see that it was a tall man—just the build of 'Enriquez,' by the way—and not for a moment to be mistaken for Zavertal, who had clearly remained behind to prevent being seen with his friend in case they were being watched.

"I was immediately confronted with the dilemma which of the two to shadow, and as I knew a lot

against the doctor, and had nothing but suspicion against the other, I decided to stay and keep an eye on Zavertal. I think now that I was wrong, and that I should have done better by following Vizard on board, for in that case you would never have fallen into this trap.

"Vizard disappeared down the stairs, and I withdrew into the vacant room till Zavertal came out of number 14, when I started on the chase again. Outside the hotel he hailed a *carroza* and drove to the Convent of Santa Lucia, I following in another cab. He remained close on an hour, and I was unable to find out what transpired, though I now know that he must have been arranging for your detention, and very likely for your murder in the event of the Consul being hoodwinked into treating you as a lunatic unfit to command the ship.

"When he left the Convent he drove back to the neighbourhood of the Hotel de Genes, and for the rest of the evening I was dodging him in various restaurants, where his sole object appears to have been to kill time till Vizard should rejoin him after being turned out of the ship by you. This occurred about nine o'clock, the meeting taking place outside the hotel, after which they walked off together to the telegraph office in the Palazzo Ducale—I guess for the purpose of cabling Nathan to wire out that Vizard was in London three days ago.

"From the telegraph office they returned to the hotel, and as I was able to ascertain that the doctor

had engaged a bed, and that they had both retired to their rooms, I went to spend the night at a neighbouring inn in order to be ready for them in the morning. After breakfast the pair came out together, boldly this time, and went to the Consulate, where they remained till half an hour after I had witnessed your arrival from a shop opposite. Unfortunately there had been nothing in what I had overheard to indicate that you were to be the victim of a plot, and I had no notion of what was going on till I saw you driven away insensible by the superintendent of the asylum and his assistants. After I had shadowed Vizard back to the hotel, Zavertal having parted with him on the quay to return to the ship, I made some inquiries which showed that it would be hopeless to approach the Consul, so satisfied was he of your condition, and I at once set about procuring your escape in my own way. And now, when I have touched up your face a little, we will get on to the station and catch the first train to the south."

Drawing an actor's make-up box from his bag, he soon altered my complexion to suit the clothes I had put on, and after making my own clothes into a bundle we started towards the city. Kennard got over the difficulty of my not knowing a word of the language by arranging that I should feign to be dumb. Before relapsing into silence, I asked him what he thought of Vizard's remaining in Genoa.

"He is here to look after you," was the reply, "and I should not be surprised if he has heard of your

escape already. I surmise that we have a dangerous organisation of educated criminals to deal with, and that Nathan is in it. But I shall know more to-morrow."

This was lively hearing, when I had been relying on an appeal to my employers to reinstate me in my command and turn the tables on Zavertal; but it was no use whining over the loss of a berth when I was about to pit myself against him in a game where the issues loomed up so much more terrible. I had no thought but to prevent and expose those conspiring scoundrels, and, if indeed lives were at stake, to save their intended victims.

We reached the Stazione Brignole with a quarter of an hour to spare before the 11.40 night train to the south was due, and after Kennard had taken tickets for Rome, being fatigued and hungry, we went into the buffet for a snack. The place was full of travellers fortifying themselves for the long run to Pisa, and we had some difficulty in squeezing in to the counter, but we managed it at last, and Kennard did the ordering. A long mirror stretched the length of the buffet opposite to us reflecting the people at the counter, and glancing along the line of faces while waiting to be served, I started so violently as to nearly capsize the soup of an old lady next me. Half a dozen places from us stood Vizard, apparently absorbed in dissecting the wing of a fowl.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *RED HEART AND BLACK ARROW.*

HALF fascinated, I was continuing to gaze at Vizard's face in the mirror when I felt a touch on my shoulder, and, looking round, caught Kennard's warning eye.

"Don't give yourself away like that," he whispered. "Go out on to the platform. I will join you directly and bring your refreshment to you. He has not seen you yet, I think."

I slipped quietly from the counter out on to the dimly lighted platform, and waited anxiously for Kennard's coming in the darkest corner I could find. He was longer than I expected, but when he did appear I was able to guess from his manner that something important had occurred.

"I have been picking pockets. I will examine the plunder—you eat," was the astonishing remark with which he handed me a packet of sandwiches and a flask of wine. The moment I had relieved him of the provender he walked to the nearest flickering gas-jet and proceeded to scrutinise what looked like several visiting cards. When he had held them all up to the light in turn, and turned them over and

over again, he came back to me, his keen eyes twinkling brightly in the gloom.

"I have scored one against them at last," he said, "but there is no time to tell you now, for here comes the train. Stand well back in the shadow. We must be guided by circumstances on the journey, but if by any chance I am separated from you, make the best of your way to Naples, and wait for the ship. Once out of Genoa, at the first opportunity you may safely resume your own character again. Ah! there comes Vizard from the buffet; he must be confident of your going south, for he is making straight for that first-class carriage without any attempt to watch the passengers. Come this way."

The train had clanked itself to a standstill, and the usual scramble for seats had begun. Vizard went to a carriage nearly opposite the refreshment-room, and as I followed Kennard to a third-class compartment nearer the engine I saw that he had already seated himself in a corner and begun to read a paper as though not at all interested in surroundings. Kennard chose a compartment in which three Italians of the peasant class were travelling, and he paused on the step to say in a whisper that for the present I had better remain dumb.

We started without further incident, and my companion was soon chattering in their own tongue to the Italians, explaining, as I guessed from his gestures towards myself and from the sympathetic glances thrown at me, the nature of my supposed infirmity.

At Chiavari, an hour after starting, one of our fellow-travellers left the carriage, and thence onwards as far as Spezia, which we reached at two o'clock in the morning, we were alone with an old woman and her son. As the train steamed into Spezia they, too, made preparations for departure, and I looked forward to being able to indulge in the relief of speech during the rest of the journey.

When the train had stopped and the Italians had got out, Kennard also rose from his seat.

"Keep your seat," he said. "There is five-minutes' wait here, and I want to try an experiment."

He disappeared among the crowd on the platform, and I sat in the far corner, hoping that at that early hour no strangers would get in. Four of the five minutes had passed when the sight of Vizard strolling slowly along the line of carriages caused me to shrink back and shade my face with my hand. But peeping between my fingers I saw that he kept his eyes straight in front, and showed no sign of interest in the compartment as he went by. Half a minute later he repassed, going towards the carriage he had entered at Genoa, and a few seconds after Kennard rejoined me, jumping in just as the train was beginning to move.

"I wanted to test him, to see if he had penetrated my disguise or could recognise me as the 'General Waldo' whom he saw on board when he was a stow-away steward," said the detective, pulling up the

window and seating himself opposite. "He doesn't know me from Adam."

"He passed this carriage while you were gone," I said.

"Quite so, and it is very probable that he spotted you, if he did not at Genoa," replied Kennard. "But the great thing is that he doesn't know me. I am most anxious that he should not discover that you are accompanied by the sham chaplain who assisted your escape. He has probably been informed of that episode, and my identity must be puzzling him not a little."

"When Zavertal got back to the ship and found 'General Waldo' missing, he would begin to suspect, would he not?" I said.

"He might if he knew what had since occurred on shore," replied Kennard, "but there has been no means of communication between the two as yet. It is even possible that Vizard, having heard of me from the doctor, may guess whence the opposition to their schemes arises, but he has no personal knowledge of me, and I want to keep my character of 'Waldo' unsuspected by them, so that I may use it again if necessary. That he has not recognised me in my present get-up as that same twaddling old fool is very certain, for I tried him pretty high. I put my head in at his carriage window and asked him if there was anything I could do for him—pretending to be a station tout, you know. Here is pretty good evidence that he has not seen us in company, and



that he does not remember me as a man he has seen before."

Kennard put into my hands a scrap of paper on which were pencilled the words "Nathan & Co., London," followed by a queer jumble of letters that conveyed nothing to me.

"It is a cypher telegram," explained Kennard. "He had no time to send it himself, and gave me a couple of *lire* to despatch it for him. He could hardly have furnished a higher proof of confidence in my being what I professed to be, and the incident is moreover useful as showing collusion between him and the owners of the *Queen of Night*. If we only had the key to that cypher what a lot of trouble it would save us. But perhaps I may put my hand on it some day."

"At Genoa you said something about picking pockets," I said, wondering if ever a plain sailor had got pitchforked into such a strange tangle before.

"Yes," was the reply, "I thought that the end justified the means, and I took the liberty of relieving Mr. Vizard of a portion of the contents of his ticket-pocket. I have told you already that I believe we have a gang of dangerous criminals to deal with, and I had cabled from Genoa to a friend in London for certain information that might help me. What I took from Vizard's pocket, however, confirms my view without making it necessary for me to wait for my friend's reply. Unfortunately, my discovery only hints vaguely at the powerful combination arrayed

against us without pointing directly to the nature or method of their designs. Still less is there any proof of crime, committed or contemplated, that would enable us to call in the power of the law."

I saw that for some reason he was not desirous of imparting to me exactly what it was that he had gathered from the cards which I had seen him examining, and I forbore to question him on the subject. I know now that the cause of his reticence on the nature of his discovery lay in the fear that it might be a source of danger to me, and yet, strangely enough, he was shortly to be the means, on the spur of the moment, of exposing me to that very danger. I could not resist, however, asking to be allowed to share the theory he had evidently formed as to the plots in which Zavertal and Vizard were engaged. I had understood, of course, that he apprehended danger to the lives of some of the passengers on the *Queen of Night*, Aline being among the number, but the why and the wherefore was what I was totally unable to fathom.

He thought a little before answering, and then said: "Well, it is fair that you should know, for I think that we shall either break up the combination once for all, or both lose our lives in the attempt. My belief is that the ship you recently commanded is nothing more nor less than a floating murder-trap, in which Zavertal is engaged by the owners, they themselves receiving enormous fees from interested parties, to poison certain of the passengers every voyage.

It is a syndicate of professional criminals working regularly for a gigantic stake. If I am right, they must net, say, forty or fifty thousand pounds a voyage over and above their legitimate profits on the professed pleasure-cruise, and they no doubt are large."

"But how could such a systematic business be carried on; how could wretches wishing to use such an institution know of its existence?" I cried, aghast at the magnitude of his suggestion.

"By means of perfect organisation, and by the details only being known to the principals who carry them out," was the reply. "For instance, you yourself have in a way been made an agent in the affair by being entrusted with the technical command of the ship, yet you were ignorant of her real mission. I think it probable that Nathan, Vizard, and Zaverfal are the sole partners in the scheme, and the actual owners of the vessel, Vizard's share of the work being, as a rule, to mix in society and make the first insidious advances to likely clients with superfluous relatives. Vizard, we know, keeps his connection with the ship a strict secret, so that possibly the amateur criminals he procures are handed over to Nathan for the final bargain to be struck."

I shuddered as I thought of Nathan's unaccountable call at Sir Simon Crawshay's house on the day I was there, and the cheque-book which the baronet was putting away when I entered his study. Kennard looked very grave when I mentioned what I had seen.

"All points the same way," he said, and relapsed into silence from which I failed to tempt him till the train began to slacken speed for the quarter of an hour's stop at Pisa. Then he expressed his intention of again minimising the risk of Vizard associating the two of us by leaving the carriage while we were in the station. "Keep my seat for me in case any one gets in—though that is not likely," he added, slipping from the footboard directly we reached the platform.

Pisa being the junction for the port and favourite watering-place of Leghorn, there was plenty of bustle in the station, though, most of the passengers being English and American tourists, travelling first class, there seemed every chance of our retaining our privacy. There was the usual scramble for the refreshment-room, the door of which was within view of where I sat, but neither among the crowds jostling into it, or passing the carriage, as at Spezia, did I catch a glimpse of Vizard. The time went slowly, and I was glad when the bell rang at last and the people hurried back to their seats.

Sitting in the corner furthest from the platform, I watched eagerly for Kennard's return, wondering if he would bring any news. Suddenly, just as I caught sight of him approaching the carriage, the sound of breathing within a few inches of my face caused me to look round at the open window next which I was sitting. There, close to me, and within touch of my hand, stood Vizard on the footboard, his handsome features ablaze with triumphant malice. I had barely

time to see the gleam of steel in his clenched fist, when Kennard opened the other door and sprang into the compartment, the train beginning to move at the same moment. He took in the situation at a glance, and his eyes snapped fire.

"*The Black Arrow pierces the Red Heart no more!*" he cried, and dashing past me sprang out, two seconds after Vizard with a bitter curse had disappeared in the darkness.

In another minute the train had gathered speed, and I was alone in the carriage—bereft of friend and foe

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *THE MESSENGER FROM LEGHORN.*

It was the morning of my second day in Naples; and no news had reached me of Kennard, or of the man from whose dagger his meteor-like dash through the railway carriage at Pisa had saved me. I had put up at the Hotel Victoria on the Parthenope Quay, whence I could watch the blue waters of the beautiful Gulf for the coming of the *Queen of Night*, and all through the day after my arrival I had been thrown into a fever every time the smoke of an incoming steamer appeared on the horizon. But I was doomed to disappointment: none of the vessels seeking harbour proved to be the graceful craft which the detective had called a "murder-trap."

My impatience was becoming almost unbearable. Not only did I chafe against the delay in the arrival of the ship, but I feared from Kennard's absence that some harm had befallen him, and that unaided I should never be able to cope with the difficulties that beset me. Acting on the advice he had given, I had abandoned disguise and resumed my own garment

before engaging a room at the hotel, and I was beginning to consider whether my best course would not be to confide my position and anxiety to the English Consul in the hope that he would be more helpful than his colleague at Genoa. Once I put on my cap to go to the Consulate, but the thought of the stone wall at the Convent of Santa Lucia overcame me, and I turned again to vainly scanning the sky-line beyond the Bay.

In the ordinary course the *Queen of Night* should have arrived at Naples early on the previous day, and as the weather was fine and calm the delay was quite inexplicable. It was now eleven o'clock in the forenoon, so that she was nearly thirty hours overdue, which, unless something had happened, was out of all proportion to any legitimate detention in so short a voyage. To my other anxieties began to be added wild thoughts of collisions, fires, shipwrecks, and a hundred other perils of the deep.

At last I reached such a pitch that to stay kicking my heels about the hotel and staring out to sea was no longer possible to me. I decided to go down to the quays and endeavour to find some one who could aid my inquiries by interpreting for me, and glad to be up and doing anything I sallied forth at once. Passing through the Via Gioja, I chanced to notice a name over a doorway which filled me with a sudden inspiration—the name of the agent whom Nathan had mentioned as his correspondent in Naples, one Signor Girolamo Volpe. If any one in the city was likely to

be able to give news of the ship, this was the man, and at all risks I determined to try him.

I say all risks, because there was every probability that if he knew who I was he would serve my enemies rather than myself by taking steps to curtail my liberty. Vizard, if still a free agent, having seen me on my way south, would have been certain to apprise their correspondent of the fact, with instructions to throw obstacles in my way, if nothing worse, and it would not therefore be safe to make inquiry in my own name and person. As I was still wearing the mercantile uniform in which I had gone ashore at Genoa, I went first to a clothier's and bought a ready-made tourist suit, changing into it, by permission of the proprietor, in a room behind the shop. Then, having given instructions for my uniform to be sent to the hotel, I returned to the Via Gioja.

The offices of Mr. Girolamo Volpe, though in a large and handsome building, were not themselves on a lordly scale, consisting, so far as I was able to judge during my brief acquaintance with them, of a couple of rooms on the ground floor just inside the main entrance. Assuming a confident air, I walked into the outer office, and found it a poky little place, with an ink-splashed counter running from wall to wall. A middle-aged, seedy-looking Italian clerk was writing at a desk behind the counter, but the back part of the room was mostly hidden from view by a portable Japanese screen between five and six feet high.



"You act as agents for the owners of the steamer *Queen of Night*?" I asked of the clerk, who came forward with alacrity.

"Yase, sar—Mr. Volpe is agent," was the reply which promised a sufficient knowledge of English for my purpose.

"Then where the devil is the ship?" I proceeded, adopting the manner of the irascible Briton on his travels. "Here have I been waiting for her ever since yesterday morning. I was unable to join her in London, so came across the Continent to join her here for the rest of the trip. The delay is very annoying."

At that moment I caught sight of the shining top of a bald head, raised an inch above the screen as if some one behind it were changing his position. It disappeared so quickly as not to distract my attention from the clerk's reply.

"It is most unforchnit, sar, that you should be so discommode," he said. "I regret ver moosh that there can be no booking per *Queen of Night* from Naples. After leaving Genoa she call for orders at Leghorn, and received instructions by cable from the owners to proceed to Cagliari in Sardinia, whence she goes direct to Alexandria. She not come to Naples at all."

This was terrible news, and I was so overcome that I nearly betrayed myself. The villains had evidently arranged that the ship on leaving Genoa should call at Leghorn, so that Zaverthal could be

informed whether I was still safely out of the way at the Convent. In this case they could, without risk of complications, carry out the original programme of visiting Naples ; but if anything should have gone wrong with their plans with regard to the quieting of myself, pursuit on my part was to be stalled off by the simple process of avoiding the port where I should expect to find the ship. The latter contingency had occurred, and by this time the *Queen of Night* must be nearing Cagliari, whence in a few hours she would start for Alexandria, and commence that portion of the voyage over which hung the foreshadowing of such dreadful mystery.

Collecting sense enough to hurl a few natural anathemas at the clerk, I left the office and walked slowly back towards the hotel. One ray of comfort was alone granted to me. I remembered that Pisa, where Kennard and Vizard had both so mysteriously disappeared, was the junction with the short line running to Leghorn, and I reflected that if Vizard had got on board there the detective would have the chance of doing so too. I hoped frantically that he had availed himself of it, and that his non-communication with me was due to his having gone to those who needed his protection so much more urgently. This thought, however, though it lifted a little of my load, did not compensate for being left high and dry where I was powerless myself to aid ; and directly I reached the hotel I inquired if there were any boats leaving for Cagliari which would give me a chance

of catching up the *Queen of Night* before she sailed. Again I met with a rebuff. The day was Thursday. The steamer for Sardinia would not leave till Saturday.

I went up to my room, well-nigh in despair, and racked with doubt whether I had better go to the Consulate or try the Italian police authorities. I had nearly, after my last experience, decided in favour of the latter, when a waiter knocked at the door and said that a signor—an English signor—was inquiring for me below. Who my visitor could be, unless it was either Kennard or Vizard, I had no idea, but, glad at the prospect of any sort of change from blank inaction, I gave orders for him to be instantly shown up. Half a minute later I was more mystified than ever, for on the individual who came tripping obsequiously into the room I had certainly never set eyes before. He was a middle-aged, rather dissipated-looking, shabbily-dressed man, whose nationality at first sight would have been a mystery if it had not been announced.

Stranger though he was, there was something about him as he entered that struck a recent chord in my memory; and I scrutinised him more closely to see if I was confronted with yet another disguise. But the notion was no sooner formed than it was dispelled by the discovery of what had seemed familiar in him: It was the shining top of his dome-shaped bald head which had recalled the bald head seen by me an hour before over the screen in Volpe's

office, and suspicious as I was growing of everything and everybody, I recognised that it would be ridiculous to assume that it was the same.

He advanced into the room smiling and rubbing his hands, and the moment he opened his mouth he chased away all inclination to confound him with any one else.

"I come from Mr. Kennard," he said. "I saw him in Leghorn yesterday morning shortly before he went aboard the *Queen of Night*, and he took advantage of my being a fellow-countryman of yours to entrust me with a message to you. He said I should probably find you at one of the hotels facing the Bay."

"Pray sit down, sir, and make yourself comfortable," I said, wheeling a chair for him. "I have been most anxious about Mr. Kennard, and at my wits' end as to how to communicate with him. Did he say anything of the circumstances under which we parted at Pisa?"

"Not a word—and for the reason that there was no time," replied my visitor. "I made Mr. Kennard's acquaintance quite casually in a hotel at Leghorn ten minutes before he was going on board. Finding that I was coming on to Naples, he asked me to make inquiries for you in the hotels along the sea-front, and to tell you in these words that the ship's programme having been altered he thought it best to go in her, especially as he had ascertained that a certain person—you would understand who—had gone on board. He concluded by begging me

to urge you to join him at Cagliari, even if you had to hire a special boat to get there, as he had every hope at that port of bringing matters to an issue and of inducing certain mutual friends, I think he said, to leave the ship."

This was good news indeed. The person alluded to as having gone on board at Leghorn was evidently Vizard, but neither he nor Zavertal would be half so dangerous with the detective at hand to watch their every move. A great deal would depend, however, on whether he was on board in his own character, or still successfully disguised as the old American General, and I questioned my visitor as to how Mr. Kennard was dressed.

"You require proof of my having met Mr. Kennard?" he said, showing at once by his manner that he had put upon my question a construction I had not intended it to bear. The information he brought tallied so exactly with my previous surmise, and with what I had learned at Volpe's office, that to doubt him after he had made his statement never crossed my mind, and I hastened to disclaim any such intention.

"I am glad to hear you say that," he replied, "for it would be hard to meet with such a reception after going to the expense of considerable time and trouble to do a service to strangers. I am sorry to say that I suffer from shortness of sight, and did not take particular notice of your friend's costume. By the way, allow me to rectify an omission—I should

have introduced myself on entering. My name is Matthew Mayfield. I am a missionary working among the English sailors who frequent Italian ports."

I should certainly never have guessed Mr. Mayfield's profession from his appearance, though I had had enough experience of long-shore preachers to know that they do not usually wear purple and fine linen. The disclosure of his avocation inspired me with a new idea, and I promptly asked him if he knew of any private boat on the point of sailing for Cagliari; or which could be chartered for that purpose at a moderate figure. I had taken the precaution on the previous day to wire home to the bankers who had my modest savings in their charge, and they had cabled back a credit of two hundred pounds for me to their local agents. I was willing, nay eager, to spend every penny of it in getting to Cagliari.

But Mr. Mayfield shook his head. "A sailing vessel could easily be procured at a small sum to put you across to the island, but it would not take less than two and a half days under the most favourable conditions of wind and tide. That, I understand, would be too late to catch the *Queen of Night*. There are no small steamers here disengaged which could be got ready for sea at such short notice."

Polishing the top of his shining head with a red handkerchief, he rose as if to go, then flopped down in his chair again, tapping his forehead and knitting his brows with the air of a man who was trying to

remember. "Yes, it was this evening," he said aloud to himself at last. "My dear sir," he went on, "it is just possible that I may be of assistance to you after all. There is a steam-yacht here belonging to a London gentleman named Smith. She is named the *Miranda*, and I know her skipper, Captain Dicey, very well. But what is more to the point, I believe that she is under orders from the owner to proceed to Cagliari this very night. Mr. Smith is not on board, as he purposes joining the yacht in Sardinia, where he has been shooting while she came to Naples to refit. I think I can induce Captain Dicey to give you a passage—on the quiet—for a ten-pound note or so."

"He shall have twenty if he will put me across," I said, eagerly, "and twenty more if he gets me there before the *Queen of Night* leaves. Will you see him, Mr. Mayfield, and place me under an eternal obligation?"

"I will go at once," was the reply; "it is one of the sweetest pleasures vouchsafed to us poor labourers in the vineyard to befriend our fellow-countrymen in their need. It is now nearly one. Expect me back in an hour from now."

And he went out, leaving me wondering at the combination of so much disinterested goodness with an extremely unprepossessing exterior.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FACE TO FACE.

I WAS not destined to improve my acquaintance with Mr. Matthew Mayfield. I would give a good deal for a quiet half-hour's interview with him now, in some room with the door locked and the key thrown out of the window ; but on that eventful day I was ungrateful enough to be just as pleased with the greasy note he sent me at the end of the hour as I should have been with his reappearance in person. I am afraid I regarded him rather too lightly as a means to an end, and though within limits I was right, I came nigh to paying dearly for my disrespect.

The note was as follows :—

“DEAR SIR,—I have been called away to visit a dying seaman—poor fellow, I fear he is unrepentant—at the far end of the Bay, and shall therefore not be able to give myself the pleasure of waiting upon you.

“But in the meanwhile I have seen Captain Dicey of the *Miranda*, and he will be willing to oblige you on the terms mentioned. The yacht is lying off the Little Mole, and will sail for Cagliari punctually



## THE QUEEN OF NIGHT.

at six this evening. You should be on board in plenty of time, as Dicey says he can't wait. The run will take about twenty-five hours, and you thus stand a great chance of finding the *Queen of Night* still off the port. Wishing you a speedy passage and a happy reunion with your friends, also assuring you of the privilege which I feel it to have been of service to you,

"I remain,

"Yours obediently,

"MATTHEW MAYFIELD.

"P.S.—Captain Dicey is an excellent fellow, and as honest as the day, but of course, as the master of a small steam-yacht, is not a man of much culture and refinement."

"Culture and refinement be hanged, so long as he runs me across to Cagliari before the *Queen* leaves the island," I cried, and I hurried off to the hotel bureau to square my account and give up my room. My baggage did not trouble me, since I had nothing but a few articles I had purchased for present requirements, and these were comfortably stowed in a handbag. Having made my small preparations, I found that I had still three hours to kill before the yacht sailed, and I decided that a portion at least of the time might be profitably spent in the selection and purchase of a revolver, for I did not know what was before me when I should again stand face to face with Zavertal and Vizard.

I went for the purpose to the shops on the Strada Chiaja, and after providing myself with a very good weapon, strolled along to the Little Mole to have a look at the *Miranda*. With my limited capabilities for asking my way, I had some little difficulty in finding her among the crowds of shipping, and when I did I can't say that I thought much of her. She was very small, being under a hundred tons, and her appearance did not suggest that the refit she had been undergoing had been very extensive. A couple of swarthy sailors, certainly not Englishmen, were busy furbishing up her dingy brass-work, and a stream of smoke from a black and rather rusty funnel showed that the fires were alight and steam in process of being got up. After all, the capabilities of her engine-room were what I was most interested in, and though the boat was anything but the smart craft I had expected, there was nothing to show that she was not fast.

By a frequent repetition of the word "capitano" I managed to make one of the sailors understand that I wanted the captain, and being informed by gesture that he was on shore, I decided to take a walk in the neighbourhood till he should put in an appearance. Turning into a by-street in the crowded part at the back of the harbour, I was reminded by the sight of a small restaurant that I had been too occupied to think of food since breakfast, and I went in and sat down at one of the small tables.

The room was a long one, with a door at the far

end forming a second entrance from another street, and at that hour was unoccupied save by the waiters, and by a couple of customers seated together over a bottle of wine at a distant table. The pair being separated from me by the length of the room I did not on entering pay any attention to them, but after giving my order, and while waiting to be served, I allowed my eyes to stray their way. One of them had risen, and was hurriedly putting on his hat previous to departure. A second later he had vanished through the door near him into the street, but not before I had intercepted a furtive glance cast at myself, and had recognised in the fugitive Mr. Matthew Mayfield, the long-shore missionary who had procured me passage in the *Miranda*, and who, according to his own statement, ought to have been soothing the last moments of a dying seaman at the further side of the Bay.

I attributed his hasty flight and evident desire to avoid me to a not unnatural dislike to have the discrepancy detected. I cannot say that the sight of him hobnobbing there in a restaurant, so far from his supposed sphere of duty, caused me actual uneasiness, but it certainly made me look at his companion with an interest I should not otherwise have felt. The now solitary occupant of the distant table sat still, steadily finishing the bottle of wine, and, I suppose, not having Mayfield's reason, evinced no concern in me or in my affairs.

He was a heavy, squat-built man of the bull-dog

type, and though he was too far off for me to note more than the outline of his features or to judge of his expression, he gave me the general idea of his being what is known as an "ugly customer." Not much was to be learned from his shabby, ill-fitting suit of blue serge, and from the unbraided cheese-cutter cap on the adjacent chair, except that he was a seafarer of not very exalted rank, and I ticked him off as the engineer or mate of a tramp steamer. Having outstayed Mr. Matthew Mayfield by some five minutes, he slouched heavily through the further doors and disappeared.

By the time I had finished my refreshment and paid the score it was five o'clock, and I made my way back to the Mole in the hope that the master of the *Miranda* had come aboard. The sailors had knocked off work and were lounging in the bows, where they had been joined by a third man, also an Italian, and, from his greasy, smoke-begrimed clothes, probably the combined engineer and fireman of this curiously manned and much-worn "yacht." On this occasion my appearance at the gang-plank seemed to excite some interest among the crew, and almost before I sang out my word of inquiry, "Capitano?" one of them rose and shouted through a skylight, the others eyeing me strangely the while. The man's summons met with an answering hail from below, and immediately a head was protruded from the companion-hatch that caused me something of a shock. The reason was this: the head belonged

to the rough-and-tumble individual whom I had seen half an hour before in the restaurant *tête-à-tête* with Mayfield.

"Cap'n Forrester?" he sang out.

"Yes; I am here by arrangement with Mr. Mayfield," I replied.

He turned and put his head back into the companion-hatch for two seconds, then came right out on deck and invited me to step aboard.

"You won't find no luxuries on this 'ere steam-yacht," he added, as I crossed the plank, "but she's a devil to go."

"You are Captain Dicey, I suppose?" I said, as he received me with a rough hand-shake.

"That's me—likewise not much to look at, but a devil to go," was his reply. "You're prepared to hand over the dibs, 'cording to contract?"

I put the stipulated amount in his grimy hand, and was proceeding to assure him that he should have the other twenty pounds on landing, provided I caught the *Queen of Night*, when he cut me short with the remark that he made no blooming doubt about hooking the balance; it was as good as in his pocket already.

"And now, seeing as the cargo's aboard, there's nothing to hinder us getting under weigh," he added. "You just amuse yourself while I do the needful, and when we're clear of port I'll show you your bunk and the saloon."

Going forward, he shouted to his crew in Italian,

and when they were at their posts the mooring rope was cast off and we were soon steaming across the Bay towards the declining sun. Dicey himself steered from the small erection, hardly to be called a bridge, for'ard of the funnel, and seating myself in the stern I paid critical attention to the steaming capacity of the vessel. The opinion I formed, as soon as we were at "full speed ahead," was that the phrase "a good'un to go" as applied to the *Miranda* was a decided misnomer. Her engines were better than might have been expected from her dilapidated appearance, but she certainly was not fast, and I began to grow anxious as to the result of the attempt to head off my enemies.

On other grounds, too, a feeling of uneasiness stole over me, now that I had time to calmly consider the circumstances under which I found myself on this strange craft. I had not been much smitten with Mr. Matthew Mayfield's manners and appearance, and it had only been the service he came to render that reconciled me to him. My confidence in him had received a rude shock in his desire to avoid me at the restaurant, and really, now that I came to think of it, had his account of himself been correct there would have been no reason for such avoidance. He would, if everything had been above-board, have made some excuse for his change of plans and have come forward to introduce me to Dicey.

Again, the *Miranda* and her crew opened up a

wide field of conjecture that was not very reassuring. The vessel might have been used as a yacht at some early stage in her history, but there was certainly nothing about her to show that she had been "in commission" lately. She gave me more the impression of a superannuated steamer that had been "laying up" for sale, and that she had been hurriedly prepared for sea at short notice. The hands, too, with the exception of the skipper, were all Italians, which to say the least of it was an incongruity in an English-owned yacht, and was a good deal more in accordance with the theory that the boat had been hired or purchased for a special purpose. If so, what was that purpose likely to be? Was it possible that Mayfield and Dicey were emissaries of Vizard and Zavertal, charged with the duty of luring me into another trap?

These unpleasant reflections were interrupted by the approach of one of their subjects. We were now well clear of the land, and the lights of the port, just beginning to twinkle in the fast-gathering twilight, would be soon left far behind. Dicey gave the helm to one of the men, and came lurching aft, a figure far more suggestive of a waterside bully or loafer than of a gentleman's sailing-master.

"Now Cap'n, maybe you'd like to go below for a bite and a sup," he said. "I'm on board wages, and the steward is on leave, so there's no tablecloths nor finger-glasses, you understand."

I should rather think there were no tablecloths and

finger-glasses in the mouldy, evil-smelling den into which he ushered me, and probably never had been. The cuddy was not more than fifteen feet long, and the narrow, ladder-like stair ran straight down into it. A couple of cabins on either side blocked all source of daylight except such as filtered through the dusty skylight, and now that night was falling only the bare desolation of the place was visible. Dicey kicked open the door of one of the cabins, which, so far as I could see, was devoid of all furniture save a bed-place and a bench.

"There's your quarters," he said. "Hold on while I light the cuddy lamp, so as you can stow your bag."

There was a certain tremor, not exactly nervous, but rather of eagerness, in his voice that somehow put me on my guard against I knew not what. It was as though he had been working up to a crisis which was now at hand, and he wished to be through with it. At least that was the way it took me in my suspicious frame of mind, and it had the effect of making me follow him out of the cabin into the cuddy while he lit the lamp. I had already registered an intention to spend the night on deck, for the narrow cabin, barely five feet across, was much too much of a *cul-de-sac* for a man labouring under my apprehensions to be left alone in, even for a minute. I had got the feeling that I wanted to see all that went on on board the *Miranda*, and above all *to be ready*.

Dicey's stumpy, grime-stained fingers fumbled with



a match-box, and soon the swing-lamp over the centre table broke into a brilliant glow that for the moment dazzled me, falling as it did full across my face. Then, while my eyes were still struggling with the sudden glare, Dicey stepped quickly back from me, and a sternly melodious voice from the darkness of the recess behind the mast told me that the crisis had indeed come.

"So, Forrester, my friend," came the well-remembered tones, "the *next time* I promised you has arrived, you see—in spite of your clumsy efforts to postpone it."

And then my eyes, grown accustomed to the change of light, at last fastened on Vizard standing not eight feet away, his pistol levelled straight at my head, while Dicey flattened himself against the wall to let the bullet pass.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *A NARROW SHAVE.*

I do not know if I shall be believed, but it is solemn fact that the glint of those murderous eyes behind the pistol barrel brought me positive relief. There had been too much hole-and-corner mystery in my life during the last few days to suit my temperament, and I welcomed the change that gave me an open foe at last, even though he had me at a disadvantage that threatened instant death.

"I do not profess to pit cunning against that of a professional criminal," said I, for his taunt had goaded me, "but if you kill me there will be one left who will prove your match. Your career is as good as ended, and you know it."

He laughed scornfully. "I am most assuredly going to kill you," he said. "That is what you are here for. But as to the second proposition—that your friend Kennard will avenge you by hindering what you are pleased to call my career—pray put any such consideration as that out of your head. You have given me so much trouble that I should

not wish you to go out of the world with the satisfaction of thinking that."

"I don't *think* it: I am *certain* of it. Kennard has as good as broken up your combination already," I replied defiantly. I saw vaguely that if I could prolong the wrangle by enticing him to gloat over his prospective victory, I might reduce the enormous odds at present in his favour. My own six-shooter was ready to hand in my pocket, but, covered as I was with his, I dared make no movement towards it. My only chance lay in creating a diversion or in seizing some unexpected advantage before he tired of letting his jaw-tackle run.

He would have been wiser to have shot me as I stood, but his malicious desire that I should die miserable got the better of his prudence. "I can see, my thick-pated sailor, that I shall have to convince you that you are not playing with babies," he hissed. "Know then that it is now forty hours since six inches of cold steel settled Kennard's hash once for all. The land-crabs on the beach at Leghorn have made a mess of his identity by now—just as the deep-sea ones will be spoiling your ingenuous features ten minutes hence. We do not leave traces, my mates and I. The excellent Dicey here knows me too well to blab, and as for the Italians—well, they are all wanted for various crimes already, and are too highly paid to talk about a piece of work that would be as bad for them as for me. I did not choose my crew among the slums of Naples on

account of their moral rectitude, you will understand. So you see, Forrester, that Zavertal and I shall soon be busy among the passengers of the *Queen of Night* with no prying eyes and ears to obstruct us. Shall I take any inquiries from you to Miss Challenor—as to the state of her health?”

The news of Kennard's murder, and the thought that Aline would soon be at the mercy of these diabolical wretches, staggered me for a moment; but seeing that my dear girl's only hope of life lay in my besting him now, I made a mighty effort to control myself, and still to fight for delay. All this time Dicey remained flattened out against the wall, leaving a clear line for Vizard's pistol, but he was in an uncomfortable attitude from which I hoped much.

“I may be powerless to prevent your next crimes,” I said, replying to the arch-villain, “but they will be your last. Do you imagine that I have no friends who will make inquiry for me. I shall be traced on board this vessel, which it will be proved was hired or bought by you.”

“Don't make any such mistake,” retorted Vizard. “The trap was baited by my own people, and I don't suppose that you, with your precious amateur-detective sharpness, told any one where you were going. And if you did it is all one, for who are you but an escaped lunatic from the Convent of Santa Lucia. Our story that you hid yourself on board the *Miranda* and afterwards jumped overboard in a frenzy will be so circumstantial that your disappear-

ance will be accounted for in the most natural manner; I can promise you."

It was true enough, and I could have gnashed my teeth with rage at my folly in believing Mayfield's specious lies. With Kennard and myself out of the way, every source of accusation against the "firm" would have been scotched, and their system might be carried on indefinitely—long after the victims of the present voyage had been forgotten. I was about to bid him shoot and be done with it, when Dicey blurted out a foc'sle oath at his constrained position.

"Why don't you plump the lead into him, mister, and give us a rest?" he added. "I'm getting stiff-jointed—spread-eagled against this cursed wall."

"Clear out then, and go on deck!" said Vizard. "It is time the course was attended to, and I want to tease Captain Forrester a little more before I finish him. He must hear how his sweetheart is to fare first."

The subordinate scoundrel slouched forward to the companion-ladder, to which he ought to have had a perfectly clear path without interfering with his employer's aim. But by some clumsiness he passed to the right instead of to the left of the mast alongside of which Vizard had stationed himself, and thus momentarily came between us. My chance had come. Vizard shouted at him, with a curse, to stand aside, but he was too late. I sprang forward, and clutching Dicey by the back used him as a shield,

while with my right hand I drew my pistol. Simultaneously Vizard fired, hoping, I suppose, to hit some part of me that was not hidden by Dicey's body, but in the fluster he miscalculated and the shot took effect in my human armour-plate. The skipper of the *Miranda* drooped limply against me, but still holding him I fired over his shoulder and hit Vizard in the right arm. The battle was over. His revolver fell harmlessly to the floor.

Allowing Dicey to sink down in a huddled heap I aimed straight for Vizard's head. He glared at me like a wounded tiger, the blood pouring from his wrist, and for one second I thought he was going to spring at me. But controlling himself with an effort that sent a muscular spasm rippling over his handsome fiendish face, he even forced his features into a smile.

"The honours of war are with you, Captain," he said. "What is to be the programme?"

"You will right-about face and stand with your back to me, and your face to the cabin wall," I said. "And keep your hands straight down and joined behind you."

Somewhat to my surprise he obeyed, and walking up to him I felt him all over in case he should have a second weapon. Sure enough he had a long clasp dagger, of which I relieved him, and then, after picking up his dropped pistol, I bade him precede me up the companion. Arrived on deck a hasty glance showed that one of the Italians was at the

wheel on the bridge, while the other sailor was lounging in the bows. The engineer was presumably attending to his duties below.

"Now," I said, pointing to a coil of rope lying under the bulwarks just forward of the bridge, "go and sit on that rope. The first movement you make, or the first attempt to speak to the Italians, and you are a dead man. The moon is full, and I sha'n't miss."

He shrugged his shoulders, and sitting down on the coil began to bind up his wound with a handkerchief. Without relaxing my watch on him I then went up on to the bridge, and taking the fellow at the wheel by the collar slung him down on to the deck, giving him to understand by a plentiful display of my revolver that he had to sit still on the opposite side to Vizard. The man in the bows seemed to have grasped the situation and discreetly remained where he was, while the engineer was attending to his duties below, in happy ignorance of what was going on on deck. Then, with a glance at the binnacle to see that the course was right for Cagliari, I took the wheel, pistol in hand and ready to use it on very small provocation.

For several hours the *Miranda* plodded on without any demand on me arising beyond unceasing vigilance and an occasional twist to the spokes of the wheel. Vizard sat quiet on the coil of rope, and from his attitude seemed to slumber, though I knew better than that. The man's subtle brain, I had no

doubt, was already hard at work devising schemes for besting me, or at least for escape before I handed him over to the law.

The two Italian sailors gave no trouble, but stretched themselves in a sleep that as like as not was genuine, while of the stricken Dicey there was no sign, and I did not know whether he was alive or dead. The engineer made himself acquainted with the change of skippers shortly after I took the wheel by protruding his head from the storeroom—to quickly withdraw it before my levelled revolver—but he showed no resentment, and when I tested his subservience by giving him an order on the engine-room bell it was promptly obeyed.

So matters were when at about two in the morning a lubberly brigantine came staggering athwart our course, and by wrongly porting her helm at a critical moment very nearly brought about a collision. For half a minute the steering of the *Miranda* claimed my undivided attention, but though it was touch-and-go my efforts successfully averted the danger, and the brigantine went on her way in safety. But her clumsiness had a serious result. When I looked again at the spot below me where Vizard should have been it was vacant, nor could I see him anywhere on deck.

It will be readily seen that his disappearance did not add to my comfort. I did not know whether Vizard was still on board or had managed to leap on to the brigantine as she shaved our counter. She



I did him sore injustice, as I was soon to learn. The head of steam lasted for an hour or so after he had gone, and then I could tell by the slackening speed that the furnace must be coaled if we were not to come to a standstill. The two Italian sailors were still sleeping, and thinking them best left as they were, I ran down to do the business myself. The engine-room hatch was a mere manhole, with an iron ladder running down to the well in which the machinery played, a second ladder leading to the stokehole below. I had nearly reached the bottom of this second descent when I noticed that the stokehole was lit up with other light than what came from the furnace door, and looking for the source I found it in a candle close to the side of the vessel. But that was not the worst. The candle was stuck in a keg of gunpowder, which the flame was just reaching as I looked.

Instinctively I rushed up on deck, for I had seen that the explosion was too near at hand for me to attempt to move the candle, and it was well that I did so. I had scarcely put the length of the ship between me and the engine-hatch, when the powder went off with a mighty roar, the deck-planks over the spot upheaved and flew in the air, and the sound of rushing water told me that the steamer's side was shattered—that she was sinking.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "DOCTOR ZAVERTAL WILL PRESCRIBE."

A HASTY inspection of the engine-room showed that the *Miranda* had not more than half an hour to float. The explosion, as no doubt Vizard had intended, had torn a great rent in her side, through which the sea was pouring in tons. The two sailors were running about, crazed with fright, and were quite useless in the emergency, though it is doubtful if anything could have been done had they kept cool—so great was the damage. The one boat was gone, and there was no time to build a raft.

Finding our case hopeless, my first impulse was to go and see if Dicey was alive, so that in that event I might bring him on deck and so give him a better chance. Ruffian as he was, I did not like the idea of his dying like a rat in a trap without knowing what was going on. On entering the cuddy I found him in a sitting posture against the cabin wall in a great pool of blood, the loss of which had made him delirious, for he was babbling unintelligibly. With a good deal of trouble I hoisted him up the companion, and once on deck the fresh air seemed to

revive him a little. He had wit enough left to see that the steamer was fast going down by the head, and he allowed me to make him fast to a spare boom on the chance of keeping him afloat till picked up.

I had scarcely got him secured to the spar when the *Miranda* pitched forward, recovered herself, and then pitched again, bows under, and went down like a stone, leaving me hanging on to the spar. We must have gone down about twenty feet with the suction, but soon rose, myself none the worse for the dip, but Dicey more dead than alive. The two sailors must have sunk at once, for they were never seen again, and small loss either.

My only hope now lay in the chance that some vessel might come our way before hunger and thirst prevailed, and I scanned the horizon anxiously for a sail or smoke. It had been daylight for some time, but the dawn had come up with a haze that up to the sinking of the vessel had limited the range of vision to a mile or so, and it was therefore with a thankful heart that I saw a great steamer heading right for us not more than half a mile away. A second glance caused me to rub my eyes and stare harder still. There was no mistaking those creamy funnels and tapering, gilded bows. It was the *Queen of Night*, steering to the south-east on a course that would take her to Alexandria.

She came steadily on at fifteen knots, and it soon became apparent that the spar and its occupants had been seen from the bridge, for at a distance of two

hundred yards I heard the engine-bell ring "stop," and immediately afterwards a boat shot out from the steamer's side. Though strong arms sent her speeding across the water, to me she seemed to crawl, so eager was I for the news she would bring. As she dashed up to the spar I saw that the bo'sun was in charge. When I sang out to him by name he looked frightened—rather to my surprise, for we had been very good friends—and then I remembered that he had probably been told that I was mad.

Dicey had relapsed into unconsciousness, and at my request he was first taken into the boat, the bo'sun not addressing me directly during the operation beyond remarking that "it was a 'rum go." Further, after I had got into the boat, and all the way to the ship, he preserved a reticence which seemed a little singular even if he did imagine me to be a lunatic. But I managed to extract from him the one piece of information for which my heart was hungering—that there had been no more deaths on board, and that so far as he knew all the passengers were well. After that he was welcome, for all I cared, to content himself with remarking that "it was the rummiest cruise he ever heard tell on."

The hour was still so early that there were but few people about to witness our arrival. As soon as the boat came alongside the ladder was thrown to us, and among the faces peering over the rails in undisguised curiosity I recognised that of McIntyre, who had superseded me in the command. I was glad he

was on deck, for I knew him for a decent, honest fellow, and had no thought but that when he heard my story and explanation he would allow me to reinstate myself without demur.

Imagine then my surprise when, the moment I was over the side, half a dozen seamen closed round me, evidently acting under orders, and McIntyre, ignoring my proffered hand, instructed them to "use me gently." That specious scoundrel Zavertal had clearly lied so circumstantially as to get himself believed, and my troubles were not over yet.

"This is a nice sort of welcome to give your captain, McIntyre," I said, "especially after he has been twice nearly murdered."

He cast his eyes down shamefacedly, as though he didn't like his job, then spoke up boldly: "Don't make it harder for me, sir, than it is already. I have taken command by cabled authority from the owners. And I have the doctor's instructions that you—that you are to be taken care of."

"How can that be?" I exclaimed. "Doctor Zavertal's last move was to have me wrongly shut up in an asylum at Genoa. How was he to know that you were going to pick me up at sea from a craft which his associate and fellow-villain Vizard sank not an hour ago?"

McIntyre turned and pointed to a little group that was standing watching us from the door of the surgery, and said simply, "He saw you through his field-glass."

A very probable explanation, but I was too amazed then by what I saw to heed his words. The group comprised not only Zavertal, with his features composed into an expression of friendly concern, but Vizard, looking compassionately dignified; and, in the guise of "General Waldo," Kennard, whom I believed to have been murdered by, and while pursuing, the man with whom he now stood in amicable converse. The sight so staggered me that I nearly called out to upbraid the American for going over to the enemy, or for having been hand and glove with them all along, but luckily I stopped in time.

I recollected Kennard's expressed intention of preserving the Waldo disguise undiscovered so that he might use it again if occasion arose, and it was possible that he was still fooling them successfully in his old character. But then what of the man whom Vizard, by his own boasting confession—made when he thought he was on the point of quieting me for ever—had slain on the beach at Leghorn? Was that only a gratuitous lie, fabricated for the purpose of harrowing the last moments of one who had crossed him?

"Come, sir," said McIntyre, as I paused undecided what to do, "we sha'n't better matters standing here. I have had a comfortable deck-cabin prepared for you next the surgery, and you will receive every consideration till you can lay your case before the Consul at Alexandria or the authorities at home—whichever you prefer."

"Very well," I said, raising my voice; "but before I go to the cabin, I should like to know how that man"—pointing to Vizard—"explains his being in the boat from which, I suppose, you rescued him?"

"Better not rake that up now," said McIntyre. "Wait till you are calmer and rested, then I'll go into it with you myself."

I could see that he was only trying to humour me as a madman, but I was determined to know what version that arch-devil had given of the occurrences of the night.

"I insist upon being told—as a condition of giving you no trouble," I replied.

"Well," said McIntyre, ill at ease, "he says he escaped from a small steam-yacht that he had hired at Naples to try and catch us at Cagliari. Says you concealed yourself aboard her, and he quit because you were shooting at the crew and threatening to blow up the vessel."

It was no use protesting, and this counter-charge had been half expected by me since I saw that Vizard had been picked up. I recognised that I should have to wait till I could collect rebutting testimony, and difficult enough that would be if Kennard was against me. There was one stipulation, though, that I had to make, even if I had to fight for it.

"Very well," I said, "I shall have to deal with Mr. Vizard later; but if you wish for peace and quietness on this ship, McIntyre, I should strongly advise you

not to allow Doctor Zavertal to come near me. I am perfectly well in mind and body, and if he comes to my cabin under the pretext of 'attending' me, I won't engage to control myself."

Zavertal, who had overheard, beckoned McIntyre to where he was standing with "Waldo" and Vizard, and said a few words in an undertone. When McIntyre returned to me he informed me that my wishes would be met, and added—

"Look here, Forrester, I'm d——d if I like all this, so I have insisted on one thing on my own hook. You are to be allowed to have any of the passengers—that is the male passengers—whom you may select to come and see you—provided, of course, that they are willing."

This was a real good turn, and I thanked McIntyre warmly. I knew well enough that Zavertal would not have consented to the arrangement if he had not had some ulterior object in view, but at any rate it was a better prospect than complete isolation. I promptly named "General Waldo" as the only visitor I cared to receive at present, and permitted my escort to see me to my cabin. It was one of the best in the ship, being between the library and Zavertal's cabin; and there would have been no fault to find with it had it not been for the two seamen who took up a position at the door as jailers.

Two other men had been told off to bring my own property from the captain's room, and I had just finished arranging the things when Waldo entered,



shutting the door behind him. I sprang forward, primed with eager questions, but stopped in amazement at his mode of addressing me. He spoke in the pronounced American twang which he had adopted to suit his disguise.

"Wa'al, Captain," he began, "this is a tarnation tall knock-out, I'm thinking. But Emerson C. Waldo isn't the man to go back on a pal in distress. You and me was tol'able close acquainted before we parted at Genoa, and I take it as a honour that you should include me in your visiting-list. Been feeling bad in your head, the doctor was telling me. What can I do to perk your sperrits up? I guess a yarn of the Wild West is powerful soothing to the jaded cerebrum. Shall I take the floor with my little skirmish with the Navajo hoss-thieves?"

So he meant to ignore, even in private, all that had passed between us at Genoa and on that eventful train-journey; and intended, in his assumed character, to treat me as a lunatic to be humoured and cajoled. All that I could make of it was that he must have been bribed by Závortal and Vizard to side with them, and swear that all I might say of my adventures in his company was the creation of a deluded brain. Too sick at heart and weary to search for further meanings, this, the only explanation of his conduct that presented itself, upset me altogether.

"If that is the way you are going to talk, for God's sake clear out before I do you an injury," I cried,

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"I thought you were a true man when I asked to see you, but I want no damned traitors here."

In real or affected terror he rushed from the cabin, leaving me in a whirl of mingled rage and despair. As I grew somewhat calmer my mind turned to Aline, and to trying to devise some scheme, by buying over my jailers or otherwise, of communicating with her. The passengers, I knew by the sounds on deck outside, were up and about by this time, and it was maddening to think that she might be passing and repassing within a few feet of me, and yet be ignorant that I was so near. It was quite likely that steps had been taken to prevent the general body of passengers from hearing that I was on board.

I was still debating how best to effect my purpose, when the sound of a colloquy proceeding at the surgery door, next to mine, attracted my attention.

First a voice, which I recognised as that of the chief stewardess, said, "Is the doctor in?"

"What is it?" came the reply, in Zavertal's tones.

"I came to tell you, sir, that one of the ladies has been taken ill," said the woman. "It is Miss Challenor, who has No. 17 state-room. She has fainted, and is quite unconscious."

"Ah, indeed," was the glibly-spoken answer that froze me to the heart. "Tell Mrs. Brinkworth, who I suppose is with Miss Challenor, that Doctor Zavertal will be down directly—and will prescribe."

## CHAPTER XX.

### MRS. BRINKWORTH'S NARRATIVE.

AT the request of my friend Captain Cyril Forrester, late of the Merchant Service, I take up my pen to fill a gap in the statement which he is preparing for press about that awful voyage in the *Queen of Night*. Certain things, very relative to the end now so fast approaching, occurred during his absence from the ship, and also while he was so wickedly confined after his rescue from the spar; and it is of these matters, of which he was necessarily not an eye-witness, that he has asked me to speak.

When the ship left Genoa none of the passengers knew that Captain Forrester had been left behind, and that Mr. McIntyre had superseded him in the command by cabled instructions from the owners at home. Still less were they made aware of the supposed reason. It was only when we were well out to sea, and there was no fear of any one on board going ashore to the captain's assistance, that Doctor Zavertal allowed the facts to leak out; and in such a hurry was he to get away, that at his instigation Mr. McIntyre would not wait a quarter of an hour for

the passenger then known as General Waldo, who had gone ashore secretly the previous day and had not returned.

Zavertal took care to lie circumstantially, so that the story he told could be corroborated. He informed the group of passengers selected for the purpose that he had discovered early in the voyage that "poor Forrester" suffered from delusions, though he had hoped that they would not interfere with his proper working of the ship. The malady, however, had developed so quickly that when the captain turned a gentleman out of the ship on the absurd ground that he was a stowaway who had been landed at Barcelona—also by a strange and sudden freak of his own—there was only one course to pursue. His (Zavertal's) responsibility as medical officer made it imperative that he should consult the British Consul, the result being that the unfortunate captain was being taken care of till arrangements could be made for his return to England.

The news of Captain Forrester's detention soon spread through the ship, but luckily I was able to forestall rumour and break it to my dear young charge, Miss Challenor, myself. Aline, as I have been long permitted to call her, had confided their engagement to me, and if for no other reason they had earned my sympathy and gratitude by their unceasing kindness during my terrible ordeal at Gibraltar. To my great relief, Aline looked upon

the doctor's allegation as so utterly ridiculous that she did not take it to heart so much as I had feared, her chief feeling being one of indignation that her lover should be temporarily subjected to such treatment at the instance of a man she already disliked. In her ignorance of ulterior motives she was confident that an hour or two would suffice for Captain Forrester to convince the authorities of the mistake that had been made, and she quite expected that he would appear at Naples to put Zavertal to confusion.

This hope was destined to be quickly shattered. At breakfast the next morning Mr. McIntyre announced that, owing to the prevalence of cholera at Naples, the *Queen of Night* would have to abandon her visit to that port, but would touch at Leghorn instead. The reason given—we know now that none such existed—was quite strong enough to stop any general grumbling at the change, but to Aline it was a terrible blow. From Leghorn the ship would go to Alexandria, possibly calling at Cagliari, in Sardinia, *en route*, we were told, but in any case offering no opportunity for Captain Forrester to rejoin her.

It must not be supposed that the passengers allowed Captain Forrester's deposition to pass without a good deal of sympathetic comment. He had become a great favourite with all, and Doctor Zavertal required all his own established popularity to justify the course he had taken. But he was equal to the occasion, and by hints and innuendos managed to hold his own. An especially strong point with him was that Captain

Forrester had prevented him from going ashore at Barcelona, when he wished to procure a certain drug to cure old Lady Carberry's neuralgia. This carried weight with the tuft-hunters, of whom there were not a few on board the pleasure-cruiser.

At Leghorn two incidents worthy of note occurred. We arrived off the port shortly after breakfast, and many of the passengers were preparing to land, when the doctor came into the saloon and announced that before any shore-parties left the ship, it had been decided that he should go and see if the town had a clean bill of health, as if it were infected we might be subjected to the annoyance of quarantine at other Mediterranean ports. He came back in a couple of hours' time with the news that several cases of cholera had occurred, and advised that though it might not be dangerous to land, it would be wiser, in view of possible future restrictions, to give the place a wide berth. It has since been proved that cholera had not been heard of at Leghorn that year.

The second item calling for remark was the return of "General Waldo," the passenger who had been left behind at Genoa. A few minutes after Zavertal came aboard I was on deck trying to comfort Aline who was terribly downcast at the prospect of leaving Italy without further news of her lover. The anchor was being got up, and all was ready for the start, when I heard some one say: "Why, here comes old Waldo; he has caught us up after all."

Looking up I saw a shore boat rapidly approaching

the ship, and, sure enough, the fare was the eccentric American tourist whose loss every one had been regretting. The fact of his reappearance soon spread, and the steamer's side was soon thronged with passengers eager to welcome him back. Zavertal was standing by when he came up the ladder, and greeted him warmly, though with some surprise.

"Why, General, this is delightful," he said, in his most genial manner. "We had quite given you up for good. What on earth have you been up to? and how came you to be smart enough to pick us up here?"

"Easy as falling off a log," was the characteristically quaint reply. "I got fooling round among the stores at Genoa, missed you by ten minutes, and came on by the cars after learning your change of destination from your agent who was still on the quay when I came up."

"Well, we're all glad to see you," said the doctor. "By the way, there is a bit of news which I fear will distress you. We have been obliged to leave poor Captain Forrester behind—a little wrong here, you know," tapping his forehead.

"You don't say," exclaimed Waldo. "That is bad hearing certainly, but, come to think of it, I guess I'm not altogether astonished. The skipper's talk has been powerful wild of late."

Zavertal must have been pleased indeed to find that one who had been so specially friendly with Captain Forrester was yet willing to confirm and approve his

action. Taking Waldo by the arm he walked him off for a confidential talk, and during the next day or two I noticed that he was almost obsequiously attentive to the strange American. Fortunately, Aline was too preoccupied, either to care about Waldo's return or to heed their conversation; but what I heard filled me with an intense disgust, which I showed later in the day by treating him with marked coolness, Zavertal being present at the time. Thence onward, so long as I knew him as "General Waldo," our relations were decidedly "strained."

On leaving Leghorn the passengers were informed that it had been decided to visit Cagliari, but first to skirt the Italian coast as far as Civita Vecchia, so that as far as possible the original programme, less the call at Naples, might be preserved. On the evening of the day after we left Leghorn, while Aline was resting in the state-room, I was sitting alone on deck when General Waldo passed me. Up to the last day or two we should have interchanged bows and smiles, and very likely he would have made some quaint remark; but now he looked straight to his front, and I pretended to admire the sunset. He walked aft to the stern and disappeared behind the wheel-house.

A minute or so after he had gone by I chanced to look down at my lap, and to my surprise saw there a crumpled slip of paper which had certainly not long been there. Opening it out, I was astonished to read—

"Follow me to wheel-house. A few words of vital importance to Miss Challenor"



The American had tossed the missive there so adroitly that the motion had escaped me. For a moment I was in doubt as to what I ought to do. His callousness about Captain Forrester's trouble hardly tallied with a desire to serve Aline, for every one on the ship had by this time guessed how matters were between them, nor could I see how it was in his power to be of use. But, reflecting that to hear what he had to say would in no way bind me to accept his services, and perhaps impelled by feminine curiosity, I rose and walked aft.

The manner of his communicating with me implied a wish for secrecy, and I therefore took care to be unobserved when I slipped behind the wheel-house. Waldo was leaning over the stern-rail watching the foaming track of the screw, but directly I rounded the corner he was at my side with a quick, gliding motion that was quite novel to the supposed aged veteran. As soon as he opened his mouth to speak I knew that he had been either acting a part before or was doing so now, for the firm, grave tones that fell upon my ears were those of a man in the prime of life.

"You have done well to come," he said. "And first of all let me correct a wrong impression. Captain Forrester has no stauncher friend than myself on this ship. I spoke as I did the other day in your hearing for several reasons, the chief of them being that I wished to incur your temporary enmity."

"I was grieved beyond measure to hear you speak so hardly and untruthfully of one who had been your

intimate," I replied. "You could not have chosen a better way to effect your purpose, though I do not understand why you should have wished to make me think badly of you."

He came close to me and said impressively, though scarcely above a whisper: "Because it is a matter of life or death to your fair young charge that Doctor Zavertal should believe us to be at daggers drawn, Mrs. Brinkworth. You and I have to stand between that poor girl and a horrible end, and a secret alliance, while we ostensibly remain hostile, will help us to combat—successfully I believe—a treacherous and insidious foe."

And then rapidly, but very clearly and concisely, he told me much that the reader has already learned from Captain Forrester's narrative—his knowledge of Zavertal's past career, his suspicions of intended foul play, and the development of doubt into certainty through what he had heard and seen at Genoa. He concluded the shocking story by describing the interrupted attempt on the captain's life at Pisa, and told how he himself shadowed Vizard to Leghorn, to lose him there, however, shortly after he had resumed his original character of "Waldo." He had no doubt that Vizard, after conferring with Zavertal, had gone south after Captain Forrester; but loth as he was to leave the captain unprotected, he, Mr. Kennard, had thought his own services most needed on the ship, and had consequently come aboard.

"You must not be frightened," he added, seeing

that I trembled violently. "Forewarned is forearmed, and if you will only lend me your assistance I think that we shall be able to beat the gang with their own weapons. You see my object is to get absolute proof on the capital charge, and so scotch them once for all. If I were to denounce them on mere suspicion I might spoil this particular scheme of their villainy, but it is very doubtful as things are if I could get a conviction, and they would be certain to commence operations again in some new form."

"Tell me how I can help," I replied; "if there is anything that a woman can do I will do it for Aline's sake, even at the risk of my life."

"At present I foresee no personal risk to you, but in dealing with such criminals—soon, I trust, to become desperate—it is necessary to be prepared," he answered, gravely. "Briefly, I want you to aid me in furnishing Zavertal with the opportunity he desires of prescribing for Miss Challenor. She must either be induced to feign illness, of course after having been told the reason, or we must give her something to bring on symptoms without doing her the slightest harm. You know her best, which shall it be? For myself I should recommend it being managed without her knowledge, as Zavertal might discover that her malady was pretended, and achieve his purpose in some other way, without tampering with her medicine."

The idea of secret drugging, however skilfully and harmlessly it might be done, was repugnant to me.

and I told Mr. Kennard what I thought. I knew that the dear girl's brave spirit would enable her to play her part perfectly, especially as it was to bring confusion on the wretch who had illtreated her lover.

"Very well, have it your way," was the reply. "We will lay the trap to-morrow. Meet me here after breakfast for final arrangements, while Zavertal is inspecting the crew. Good-night, and courage."

He vanished round the corner of the wheel-house, and after waiting a few minutes I, too, went out on to the deck, dazed and horror-struck by what I had heard, but determined to be worthy of the trust reposed in me.

During the ensuing night it will be remembered that first Vizard and then Captain Forrester were picked up, and the latter will resume his pen to relate the complications that resulted.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *DOCTOR ZAVERTAL LOSES A PATIENT.*

(Captain Forrester's narrative continued.)

THE horror of hearing that Aline was ill and that Zavertal had been called in to attend her left me for a minute stunned and helpless, but the shutting and locking of the surgery-door, followed by the sound of a receding footstep, roused me to action. The doctor was already starting to visit his patient.

I sprang to the door of my cabin; only to find it locked; but one of the sailors on guard opened it in answer to my appeal, standing in the entrance so as to block all possible exit. From behind him the black-bearded face of his mate peered at me, and I saw that two of the most powerful seamen in the crew had been selected for the post of jailer to their late captain. To make a rush for freedom could only end in discomfiture.

"See here, my men: there's a hundred pounds apiece for you if you'll just forget to mind that doorway for a minute," I said, "and I will guarantee that

you shall never know what it is to want a good berth again.

The foremost man made a wry face and gave a sea-scape. "Very sorry, Captain," he said. "We might think of it, if so be it was going to do you any good. But what 'ud be the use on it. You'd be collared and brought back afore you'd got half the length of the ship."

There was a good deal of rude sense in his way of looking at it. But I felt that at all hazards I must warn Mrs. Brinkworth against allowing Zavertal access to Aline, and accordingly altered my tactics.

"Would you take a note for me—to one of the lady passengers?" I asked.

The man turned to whisper to his mate, but before they had come to any conclusion Kennard pushed his way past them into the cabin, and in his character of a privileged visitor shut the door in their faces.

"It's all right," he said, seeing that I was about to fire up again. "You ought to have trusted me sufficiently, Forrester, to know that I was only kidding when I was here an hour ago. There was a very good reason. Zavertal was watching us, and listening to every word that passed, from the surgery—just as I believe he took stock of you in Nathan's office through the Black Sea chart on the day they engaged you. I am not in the habit of selling my friends."

"You do well to blame me," I said, overjoyed at the discovery of my mistake, "but you must remember

what tortures of suspense I am undergoing, and forgive me. Why even now that villain has gone below to his deadly work."

"It is of that that I come to tell you," he said. "Miss Challenor is a brave and willing patient in his hands, with a full knowledge of his designs." And he went on to describe the trap that he and Mrs. Brinkworth had laid, and to assure me that nothing would pass Aline's lips that could possibly harm her.

"All I want is to get a sample of the doctor's medicine for analysis, and then my case against him and Vizard will be complete," he said. "I am a fairly good chemist, and as soon as my tests have found poison I shall go to McIntyre and lay the facts before him. Unless he wants to risk being tried as an accessory he will have those two put under lock and key, and start home with them without more ado. And now what really happened on the *Miranda*? So far I only have Vizard's version, you know."

I shortly recounted what had befallen since parting with him at Pisa, not forgetting to mention Vizard's triumphant assertion that he, Kennard, had been killed by him at Leghorn. He listened intently to the end, and then said—

"He left the *Miranaa* in the company of the Italian engineer, you say. He was alone in the boat when picked up, which looks very much as if he had two murders to account for during the last three days. He must have taken a short way of destroying evi-

dence. I think, too, I can explain his supposition that he had done for me. After changing back into my Waldo get-up I gave the clothes in which he saw me in the train to a loafer on the beach. The poor beggar must have put them on and paid for them with his life. I chose him for the gift because he was about my height and build. But hush—not a word—there is Zavertal back at the surgery.”

The sound of the next door being unlocked, opened, and relocked reached us, and at the same moment Kennard glided across the cabin to the partition-wall. Running his hand deftly over the panelling, he stopped at a piece of carved fretwork over the washstand, examined it closely, and then taking a penknife from his pocket gently inserted the blade in one of the holes, to which at the same time he applied his eye.

After a long gaze, apparently into the thickness of the partition, he turned, and with a finger on his lips, beckoned me to join him. Still keeping his knife in the hole in the fretwork, he motioned me to place my eye where his had been, and I immediately saw that the ornament simply covered an aperture into the surgery, its function being concealed from any occupant of my cabin by a piece of cloth, the colour of the panels, which Kennard had raised slightly with his knife. Zavertal was standing at the dispensary shelf, with his back to us, manipulating the bottles.

Kennard only allowed me a peep, and then drawing me aside resumed his place at the hole—watching intently for fully five minutes. At the end of that



time he suddenly withdrew the knife, allowing the cloth veil to fall into position, and remained perfectly still. Listening breathlessly we heard Zavertal move across the surgery and go out, taking his usual precaution of locking the door behind him. His footsteps died away in the direction of the companion-stairs.

"He has gone below with the medicine," said Kennard, "but he will not incur suspicion by personally administering it. Should he try to do so, Mrs. Brinkworth has her instructions and is quite equal to the occasion."

"Aline—Miss Challenor—is not still feigning unconsciousness?" I asked, for the idea of my sweet girl being subjected to all this was horrible to me.

"Oh dear no," replied Kennard: "that would have been trying her too high. She partially 'recovered' before Zavertal's first visit, but she cleverly managed to look quite ill enough for the purpose."

"Does she know that I am on board?"

"Yes, the news of your being picked up furnished an excellent excuse for the faint," said Kennard. "I have no doubt that Zavertal, having an opportunity ready made for him, will reverse the intended programme and devote his devilish cunning to her case before taking on Lord Darranmore's—and yours, which he most certainly means shall follow. The villains will never rest till you are as dead as I am supposed to be, for then, with the exception of the

man Dicey, they would be free, or believe themselves to be free, from all sources of accusation."

"They will probably settle Dicey too," said I, thinking of the disappearance of the *Miranda's* engineer.

"That is quite on the cards," replied Kennard, "and I am keeping an anxious watch for his return to sense. The delirium is already abating, and as soon as possible I shall try and frighten him into rounding on his employers. Now that Zavertal believes, from his observations through that fretwork, that 'Waldo' is obnoxious to you, I can come and go anywhere on the ship without incurring suspicion. After what passed this morning, though, I must not negative that impression by visiting you too frequently. Expect me when I have definite news, and in the meanwhile don't be afraid of your food. They won't have two 'cases' on hand at once."

Gripping me by the hand, which was more than I deserved after my mistrust, he slipped out of the cabin and I was left alone to my thoughts. They were brighter far than any I had had for days, for though anxiety would last till those two fiends were openly accused, I could not help feeling confident that Kennard would beat them now. And yet, so long as there remained the possibility of a hitch in the arrangements—of some devilish trickery which should baffle Mrs. Brinkworth's watchfulness and the detective's foresight—my mind could not be but in a turmoil of impatience and dread.

After a mid-day meal, which was served to me, as my breakfast had been, by one of the doorkeepers, I fell asleep, utterly wearied and worn out by the experience of the previous night. For some time my brain enjoyed a respite of complete oblivion, but after a while I began to dream, and a vision of strange scenery and fantastic shapes formed before my sightless eyes.

Gradually, out of the blackness, there grew the outline of a gigantic precipice running sheer down to a boiling sea studded with jagged fangs of rock. On the top of the cliff, bent inland by the force of a thousand gales, stood a solitary fir tree, and a few feet from its base two men were locked together in deadly struggle, their bodies swaying hither and thither on the brink of the abyss. As the vision grew clearer I saw that round the tree-trunk was made fast a rope, one end of which dangled fifty feet down the side of the cliff, supporting the form of a woman. All at once a blood-red moon appeared in the sky and shed a lurid light on the struggling men, showing me the faces of Zavertal and Kennard. Even as I looked Zavertal seemed to prevail, and shaking Kennard free hurled him over the precipice. Then, as he sprang, knife in hand, towards the straining rope I recognised in the dangling figure—Aline.

I awoke, with a cry of horror on my lips, to find McIntyre standing over me, a gravely sympathetic expression on his rugged Scotch face.

"I roused you too roughly," he said in a kindly tone.

"I'm not thinking that you bear malice over this affair, so I just looked in to do you a turn unbeknown to anybody. You have, mayhap, heard that the young lady, Miss Challenor, is ill?"

McIntyre was right in supposing that I felt no resentment against him for his involuntary usurpation. And he was ten years older than myself, a married man and the father of a family, so that I could accept from him as friendly interest what I might have regarded as an impertinent suggestion from another.

"Yes," I replied; "I have heard of it. Is she worse?"

"It's just that that brings me," he said with increased solemnity. "Every one on the ship knows you were sweethearts, and I was thinking it's not fair for you not to see her, and she so sick. So come along with me and I'll take you to her."

Greatly agitated I rose to follow him, though as the good fellow was clearly acting on his own responsibility and in ignorance of the ruse that was being played, I could not believe that there was real cause for alarm. Still, the awful chance that vigilance had been eluded by professional cunning was ever present, and as I passed out of the cabin with my conductor I braced myself for what in any case must be an ordeal.

That McIntyre was not yet in Kennard's confidence, and still thought me mad, was proved by the fact that the two seamen followed us at a respectful distance, doubtless by his instructions. There were no passengers about, and the clock on the companion-

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stairs furnished the reason by proclaiming that it was the saloon dinner hour. At the foot of the stairs we turned aft into the corridor, and here again there was no one to be seen. Only from the open door of Number 17 state-room came the sound of a woman's weeping.

"I fear she is worse," said McIntyre, hastening his steps.

But the sound of crying was too much for me, and springing past him I rushed to the state-room door. Aline lay in her berth, her features serenely calm in waxen whiteness, while Mrs. Brinkworth was endeavouring hysterically to prevent Zavertal from approaching the bed.

"You shall not touch her," she cried frantically. "My darling girl is dead, and no hands but mine shall tend her. Go away, I say, and leave me to close her eyes."

"It is usual for the doctor to verify a decease, but I can see that there is no room for doubt in this case," Zavertal replied. "I leave you, Madam, with my deepest sympathy."

Then he turned to come away, and saw me. His hand went to his breast-pocket, but I was too quick for him, and clutching his collar I dragged him from that sacred presence, to pin him by the throat to the corridor wall outside with fingers keen to strangle. As I gazed into his fast-purpling face, all the agony of knowing that he had prevailed broke from me in the one hissed word—"Murderer."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### KENNARD'S COUP.

NOT for long was I to revel in the luxury of feeling that treacherous fiend's life ebbing under the pressure of my thumbs. McIntyre's rough grasp fell upon my shoulder, while the two attendant seamen flung themselves upon me and dragged me away. As I was hustled to the companion-stairs Kennard appeared, coming hurriedly from the saloon.

"For God's sake speak a word to him, General Waldo," appealed McIntyre, "mayhap it will quiet him. The poor young lady has passed away, and it has clean lifted his senses. He has nearly killed the doctor."

But all the "word" I got from Kennard as he brushed by us toward the state-room where Zavertal was picking himself up was the whisper: "Don't be a fool, you will spoil everything!"

Heaven knows, now that the mad delight of choking Zavertal was denied, there was no need to quiet me. They led me back to the cabin on deck half-dazed with grief, and thrust me in, McIntyre showing by his dejected manner that he sorely

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repented the rash kindness which had provoked such a scene. He had probably had a taste of his medical officer's quality already, and dreaded the consequences of his having taken me below—too late—for a last word with my dying love.

How long I remained in that stricken state I know not, but as my numbed brain cleared, the brief sentence Kennard had spoken was still ringing in my ears, and to my calmer judgment it began to present vague possibilities of hope. True, I was in the position of one who clutches at straws, but there the straw was, all the same. "Don't be a fool," he had said, "you will spoil everything." Despite his calling, Kennard was a kindly and sympathetic man, and these were hardly the words he would have used to one so bitterly bereaved if he had known that Aline was dead. It would, indeed, have been the height of selfish egotism to describe his eagerly-desired detection of the criminals as "everything," when their crime had robbed him whom he was addressing of more than all. Again, if he had known that she was dead, surely the time would have come for accusation and denouncement, but in place of that he seemed as keen on preserving secrecy as ever.

On the other hand, to discount my vague hope, there was the fact that he could not possibly know that she was *not* dead. He was coming from the saloon dinner-table, whence his watchfulness must have prompted him to follow Zavertal on the latter's

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being summoned to his patient; and he could not therefore be sure that some laxity on Mrs. Brinkworth's part had not yielded an opening to the enemy in the interval since he last held communication with her. Then, too, there was the doctor's pronouncement that the death was unmistakable, and Mrs. Brinkworth's frantic grief.

So, as soon as the clouds had lifted, they began to lower again, and I longed eagerly for the coming of Kennard, who alone could solve the mystery. Looking at my watch I found that it was close on eleven o'clock, and I wondered that he had not been before. He must have known my need of him, and yet here was the time when the passengers retired to their berths at hand, and he had given no sign. From the sailors who had me in charge I could gather nothing, for they obstinately refused to speak.

It must have been half an hour after the hush on deck had told that the passengers had retired for the night, that the door was gently opened and Kennard stole into the cabin. I had not been trusted with a lamp, lest in my supposed madness I should set fire to the ship, but a ray from the electric arc outside falling on his face showed that even his steadfast nerves were strung to highest tension. He came close, and, drawing me to the light, read the agony I had been enduring in my sunken cheeks and heavy-lidded eyes.

"Bah, and is it as bad as that?" he murmured. "Why, man, you never give a fellow credit for anything. So you really thought—eh?"



"And it is not so!" I cried, almost beside myself with the reaction that I felt was coming.

"You ought to have known that I could not be more explicit then," he replied. "I should not have spoken roughly to you if you had had real cause for grief. I could not get to you before, because for us to be in communication might have given the whole thing away; but if I could have foreseen that good-hearted idiot McIntyre's move, I should have found means to warn you somehow. As it was, I had taken careful steps to prevent your being troubled with bad news till I had told you the programme. Zaver-tal and Vizard are closeted together in the latter's cabin below, but it is well to preserve caution to the end. Listen"—and he whispered in my ear half a dozen short, crisp sentences that nearly sent me mad with joy.

"It is to be performed outside here at midnight—an arrangement prompted by gratuitous malice for the purpose of harrowing you and snatching a paltry revenge," he concluded. "And now I must be off to see that there is no hitch. Vizard, of course, will have no reason to be present, but he is nearly sure to make an excuse for being on deck at the time, if only for the pleasure of gloating over you. I am ready for him either way."

He left the cabin as quietly as he had entered, and looking at my watch I saw that it wanted ten minutes of midnight. Half the time had elapsed when I heard a whispered conclave outside. Directly it

## KENNARD'S COUP

ceased, one of my guards put his head in at the door and said—

"Begging your pardon, sir, for the mistake that's been made, and for our part in it, but it is Mr. McIntyre's orders that the door is unlocked and you free to leave when it suits. Meantime, me and my mate is to remain—seemingly on guard."

"Right you are, my man," I replied; "least said soonest mended. I'll stay here for the present."

He went out, closing, but not locking the door, and I stationed myself so as to command a view of the deck through the window. The night was dead calm, and there was no motion on the ship except the vibration of the engines. At last the silence was broken by the clanging of eight bells for midnight. Hardly had the last stroke died away when the sound of footsteps coming from aft reached me, and peering closer yet I saw McIntyre walking slowly at the head of a little procession, which halted and ranged up at the ship's side opposite my cabin.

There was no doubt about the nature of the ceremony that was to be performed. Immediately behind McIntyre, who led by virtue of his position as acting captain, came four sturdy sailors carrying a coffin, that for obvious reasons was evidently heavily weighted. In its rear followed Zavertal and Mrs. Brinkworth, while after a little interval Vizard strolled up, as if attracted to the scene by chance, and took up a position whence he could see my window as well as the business in hand.

At a motion from McIntyre the sailors put the coffin down close to the side, and drawing back a little, appeared to wait respectfully for McIntyre to commence reading the service. The two men who had been guarding my door also lounged forward a little, the effect of the grouping, which was carried out in the most natural manner, being that both Zavertal and Vizard, though standing apart, had each three or four seamen in their immediate vicinity.

In the ordinary course everything would have been ready for commencement, but McIntyre hesitated, turning over the leaves of his prayer-book as though he had a difficulty in finding his place. This is not at all an unusual occurrence with a captain called on to read the burial service, but McIntyre was shooting glances in the direction of the companion-stairs. They escaped the notice of the mourners, whose heads were decorously bent; but I, watching every move, saw them quite plainly, and burned with feverish anticipation.

At last a quick flash passed over the Scotchman's face, and he dropped his book with a bang on the coffin-lid. Knowing what was to happen at that signal, I gazed from Vizard to Zavertal and back again, not to lose a fraction of the vengeance which they had thought to wreak on me, but which, after all these tortuous windings, was now to be turned against themselves. The coffin-lid was raised with a jerk, and out sprang young Lord Darranmore, his face aglow with excitement and boyish impudence.

## KENNARD'S COUP.

"You've got the wrong one, Doctor, and not dead either," he piped in his shrill boyish treble, pointing at Zavertal, while the sailors edged up closer. "So nice of you to change the turns and give a poor boy a chance. You had better have stuck to the programme, and settled *Darraunmore on the run from Italy to Alexandria*, eh?" And he kept on vociferating till I stepped quietly out of the cabin, when even his exuberance yielded to the coming climax.

At the first sight of the little Earl, Zavertal's broad face had broken out into beads of perspiration; and Vizard, scowling defiance at me, now muttered a startled oath heard by all. The suddenness of the grim jest sprung upon them had, as was intended, caused them to "give themselves away" in the presence of witnesses, but their cup was not yet full. As I advanced to join the group on one side, from the other came the sound of Kennard's natural voice, and all eyes turned that way to see the American detective, stripped of all disguise, coming from the companion-house with Aline on his arm. At the sight, Zavertal folded his arms and groaned as one who admits that hope is gone.

At the same moment McIntyre touched his cap to me and said, "You are in charge again, sir. Thank God my part is done."

I merely nodded, for I was watching Vizard narrowly, guessing that he was made of sterner stuff than his fellow-criminal, and now a furtive motion of his hands caused me to act promptly.

"Seize that man," I cried to the sailors behind him, and so well drilled had they been by Kennard and McIntyre in the part they had to play that six brawny arms were round the villain before he could get to his pistol. Simultaneously the other sailors took possession of Zavertal's portly form, and the capture was complete.

At a gesture from Kennard Mrs. Brinkworth joined Aline, and together the two ladies left the deck—glad enough, as they told me afterwards, to be released from the glare of Vizard's burning eye. He made no attempt to struggle with his captors or to utter speech, but his silence, aided by that snake-like glitter, was more terrible than words.

"So," said Kennard coming in front of him, "my European trip has led to business. I had heard of the Red Heart and Black Arrow—as who of the inner circle of my trade has not—but I never thought that a six months' holiday was to lead to the breaking of the gang and the arrest of its chief. I have to thank the taint of an old scent, left by your friend Zavertal there, for the lucky chance. You made a false step, Mr. Vizard—to call you by your last known name—when you allied yourself with a gentleman of such a notorious record."

It will be remembered that Vizard had never seen Kennard in his own character, and he had excellent reasons for not suspecting his identity. The stranger's taunt stung him into curiosity. "Who is this fellow?" he ground out between his clenched

teeth, shooting a furious glance at his trembling colleague.

"It is Kennard; you must have made a mistake," the wretch replied.

"Then I have met my match; we are fairly beaten," was Vizard's comment, murmured in tones that had changed to the quiet chagrin of a beaten man; and when at the same moment I signed to the seamen to take the prisoners to the place that had been prepared for them, he gave no trouble.

I shall always believe that this sudden submission was only a ruse of his subtle brain, working towards some fresh scheme for revenge, liberty, or both; but if so he was moved by a short-lived hope. The procession had taken on about half a dozen steps, when the wild figure of a man, and with nothing on but trousers and shirt, rushed from some lair where he had lain concealed, and stabbed Vizard again and again, all helpless as he was in the grasp of his guards. Kennard, McIntyre, and I, sprang forward and seized the assailant, to find that he was Dicey—the skipper of the *Miranda*—relapsed into raving delirium.

We handed him over to the men of the watch who crowded round, as quiet as a lamb now that his purpose was gained, and exulting that he had "got square" on the man who had tempted him with fair promises, then shot him, and afterwards abandoned him in the doomed vessel.

"Any one of the wounds would have been fatal,"

pronounced Kennard, rising from an examination of the great criminal's dead body. "Believe me, I am not spiteful when I express the wish that that miserable tool of his could have permitted me the luxury of seeing him hanged."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE ANCHOR DOWN.

AFTER Zavertal had been safely stowed under lock and key, a council of war was held between Kennard, McIntyre, and myself, and resulted in a decision to run for Naples, and report all the circumstances at the Consulate.

It was necessary that the authorities at home should be apprised of what had happened, so that they might be beforehand with any rumours that might enable Nathan to escape; while it was also imperative that the position of Sir Simon Crawshay and others as clients of the Murder Syndicate should receive the early attention of Scotland Yard. We were also moved by the consideration that Vizard must have had accomplices of greater or lesser degree at Naples—Mr. Matthew Mayfield, for instance—whom it would be highly desirable to secure.

The conference lasted far into the night; but late, or rather early in the morning, as it was when it ended, I found Aline up and waiting for me in the saloon, whither Mrs. Brinkworth had taken her. I



must ask permission to draw a veil over our meeting. We had been parted a few days only, but into them had been crowded the events of a lifetime, and both of us had stood during that brief separation on the threshold of the Great Beyond. What people have to say to each other under these conditions concerns themselves alone.

The explanation of my dear girl's apparent death had already been furnished to me by Kennard. Having found unmistakable traces of poison in the medicine supplied to her by Zavertal, he was struck with the idea of springing such a surprise on them that they would be bound to incriminate themselves. In selecting his rather gruesome method he was moved by the fact that he was dealing with gruesome men, and that nothing short of the resuscitation of their supposed victim would attain that end. As an afterthought, however, he modified the plan by substituting Darranmore for Aline as the occupant of the coffin, and the boy, needless to say, entered into it heart and soul.

The great difficulty in his way was to manage so that Aline should simulate death without being detected by Zavertal, and here my dear girl herself came to his aid by proposing to take an anæsthetic drug which he had with him. All that remained was to prevent Zavertal from closely examining the "body," and to bestow her, unseen, in a place of safety during the interval between her "death" and "funeral." This was cleverly contrived, first by Mrs. Brinkworth's

## THE ANCHOR DOWN

skilful acting, at which I happened to be present, and secondly by McIntyre, who was taken into confidence after my return to confinement, giving facilities for smuggling Aline into another cabin. There she remained till it was time for her to appear at her own burial and complete the climax. Darranmore was introduced into Aline's cabin, half a dozen trustworthy sailors were told off as bearers, with instructions how to act, and the mine was laid which ended in the breaking of the gang.

In the morning there was no keeping the tragedy of the night from being known throughout the ship. To prevent false reports getting about I assembled the passengers in the saloon, and at my request Kennard briefly explained what had occurred. The announcement caused a widespread horror which quickly developed into a general determination to leave the *Queen of Night* at Naples and return home overland rather than continue the voyage on a vessel with such terrible associations. As usual the panic was strongest among those who never could have had any cause for alarm; and indeed it was afterwards proved by documentary evidence found at Nathan's office that Orlebar, Lord Darranmore, and Aline were the only passengers on this trip who had sailed under the "special" arrangement which was the mainstay of this lucrative but fiendish enterprise.

When it was decided to turn the ship's head for Naples we were about fifteen hours' steam from that port, and it was therefore far advanced in the after-

noon when we reached the Bay. Kennard was very anxious that there should be no communication with the shore till he had laid the case before the Consul and enabled the latter to cable to the home authorities, and accordingly at the detective's request I signalled an urgent request for the British representative to come aboard. On his arrival it was arranged that the steamer should be taken home by McIntyre, and that Zaverthal should go in her in close custody. Kennard and I were to escort Mrs. Brinkworth and Aline home overland.

After noting all particulars the Consul left to cable to Scotland Yard and to see to the arrest of Signor Volpe—a proceeding in which I was especially interested, as it was surmised that if the Italian police were smart enough the haul would include Mr. "Matthew Mayfield." I may say here that the hope that that mealy-mouthed scoundrel would be captured was doomed to disappointment, for the office was found empty and the bird flown. It was conjectured that he had scented danger on seeing the unexpected arrival of the *Queen of Night*, and the signal for the Consul. It transpired that with the exception of the Italian clerk this person formed the whole establishment of a mythical Volpe, posing as a manager under the name of Tucker, Mayfield being a pseudonym put on for his dealings with me. How far he was acquainted with the methods of his principals was never known, but it is beyond doubt that he aided Vizard willingly and with his eyes open to

entrap me into the *Miranda* for an object that he must have known was a nefarious one.

The antecedents of the man Dicey were found to be pretty much what might have been expected. He had been discharged for misconduct from an English yacht, and was loafing about the quays of Naples, ripe for any villainy, when Vizard found in him a ready tool to navigate the rattletrap old steamer which he purchased, first to be the scene of my murder and then as a means of rejoining the *Queen of Night*. We can dismiss him from these pages once for all. He was landed from the ship and taken to the International Hospital, where he died a week later from the effect of the wound received in the cabin of the *Miranda*.

It was at Amiens, as we were speeding northwards across France, that the first news reached us through the English papers of the effect of the Consul's cabled information to Scotland Yard. The train was full of the *Queen of Night's* late passengers, but we four—Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth, Kennard and I—had secured a *coupé* to ourselves. The detective had been eagerly purchasing papers at the bookstall, and when he returned to his seat, deep in the perusal of a heavily-leaded paragraph, it was plain that he had found what he wanted. He read quietly to the end, and then said—

"That man Mayfield has euchred the Consul and got his own cable in first. At any rate Nathan got wind of the exposure and bolted. He is safe in

custody though, by means of a smartish capture as he was leaving for Holland."

He hesitated a little, then looked across at Aline and added, "I suppose you have no lingering feeling for your guardian, Miss Challenor?"

"I never had any to linger," said Aline, simply. "There could not be any pretence of affection between us, for he always treated me as if I was an encumbrance. My father had no near relatives, and but few friends, and only appointed him because he had the next place to ours in the country and had a knowledge of our estates."

"Well, then, there will be no harm in telling you the news," said Kennard. "Sir Simon shot himself yesterday morning, on learning through the papers of Nathan's arrest. It is rumoured also that the Honourable Ralph Darran, the next heir to the Darranmore title, who sent our lively young Earl on this trip, is missing. I should not be surprised to hear that there are other gaps in English society later, due to Zavertal's operations on previous voyages. There have been three such, I understand, this year since the ship has been under its recent owners."

His words were prophetic, for in several families of more or less note there were mysterious disappearances during the next few days, and it did not fail to be remarked that most if not all of the withdrawals were of recently enriched inheritors who had lost relatives on the *Queen of Night*. So secretly had the system been worked that there was no proof which

would have justified pursuit and arrest, the documents found at Vizard's palatial mansion in Park Lane being written in a cypher which defied discovery. Enormous sums were found entered in a private ledger in a safe hidden in the wall of an octagon room where he transacted business, but there was no vestige of readable matter showing on what account they had been received. They, however, tallied with sums appearing in the banking account of Nathan & Co., and were undoubtedly the various amounts of blood money received by the "firm."

On reaching London we took Aline to the firm of solicitors who had acted for her late father, and they at once made arrangements that she should remain with Mrs. Brinkworth till she should attain her majority, and thus avoid the necessity of having to return to Sir Simon's house, where his sister was now in possession. Orlebar's ill-used wife forgot her troubles in serving us, and is to this day our devoted and faithful friend. She was doubly avenged, inasmuch as the wicked woman who had supplanted her in her wretched husband's affections, and had then sent him to his doom, herself met with a terrible end a year later in a revolution in the Argentine, whither her fears of discovery had taken her.

With the exception of the conviction and hanging of Nathan, which followed in due course, the last act in this eventful drama occurred a week after our return. We were sitting—Kennard and I—late one evening in the hotel where we had taken up our

abode, and the detective was telling me a few facts about the gang whose symbol was the "Red Heart and Black Arrow."

"Vizard was the sole irresponsible chief," he said, "but Nathan, and of late Zavertal, were partners on an equal footing so far as knowledge was concerned. The subordinate helpers in all parts of the world, while thoroughly unscrupulous, probably had no guilty knowledge beyond their own humble parts. I heard of the organisation years ago, when they confined their talents to big bond forgeries and gigantic long-firm frauds. I imagine it was Zavertal's reputation as a successful poisoner that inspired Vizard with the idea of enlisting him and starting a yacht-owning murder-syndicate."

"If you had not chanced to sail with us the thing might have gone on indefinitely," I replied. "An unscrupulous ship's-doctor has wholesale facilities for murder without fear of inquiry. It was a tremendous scheme, but the basis of it was really very simple and easy."

"The schemes of great criminals are generally like that," said Kennard; and "Come in," he added, as someone knocked at our door.

It was McIntyre who entered, looking so haggard and dishevelled that we were not surprised at the news he brought. The *Queen of Night* had been burned at sea off Ushant, and Zavertal with her.

"His was the only life lost," proceeded McIntyre, when we had made him comfortable. "We kept him

for safety in one of the steward's pantries on the lower deck, and when the fire broke out and it became necessary to quit the ship I went below with a man to fetch him. On unlocking the door from the outside it refused to open, and I then remembered that there was a bolt on the inside as well. This he had shot, and nothing I could shout through the door would induce him to draw it. The fire had gained such ground that we should have lost our lives if we had stayed to break down the door. It was practically a case of suicide."

"A fitting end for the ship and the man," was Kennard's only comment.

And now as this has been a story of incident I must not "lag" superfluous before my readers with no more incidents to offer them. My wife's arguments prevailed, and I have abandoned the sea. But though I have become a landsman I am not wholly an idler—with the care of her vast estates to employ me. It is two years since that stormy cruise ushered in for Aline and me a time of peaceful calm that knows no cloud, and shows no sign of breaking; and, writing here in our quiet Herefordshire home, with miles and miles of apple-blossom outside my window, the cell in the Convent of Santa Lucia, the cuddy of the *Miranda*, and the deck-cabin next the surgery on the *Queen of Night* seem far away indeed. Yet that they were once very present realities two things remain



## THE QUEEN OF NIGHT.

always to remind me—the letters of my friend Kennard, well and prosperous in the States, and the sweet voice that is even now bidding me lay down my pen—the voice of “the lass that loved a sailor.”

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